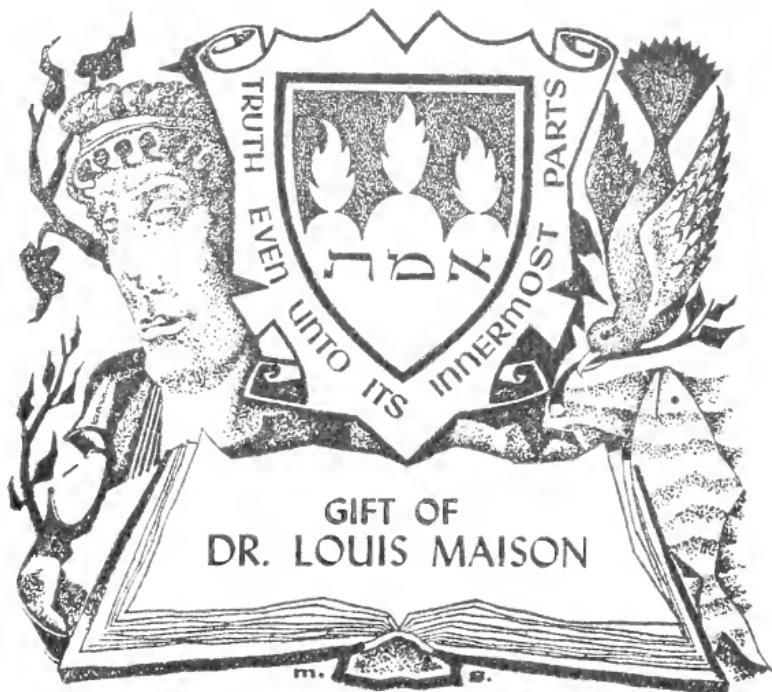


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LORNA DOONE:

A Romance of Exmoor.

BY R. D. BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF 'CRADOCK NOWELL,' ETC.

Μή μοι γάν Πέλοπος, μή μοι χρύσεια τάλαιντα
Εἴη ἔχεν, μηδὲ πρόσθε θέειν ἀνέμων·
Ἄλλ' ὑπὸ τῷ πέτρᾳ τῷδ' ἄσομαι, ἀγκὰς ἔχων τυ,
Σύννομα μᾶλ' ἐσορῶν τὰν Σικελὰν ἐς ἄλα.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, SON, & MARSTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1869.

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LORNA DOONE:

A ROMANCE OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH I was under interdict for two months from my darling—"one for your sake, one for mine," she had whispered, with her head withdrawn, yet not so very far from me—lighter heart was not on Exmoor than I bore for half the time, and even for three quarters. For she was safe; I knew that daily by a mode of signals, well-contrived between us now, on the strength of our experience. "I have nothing now to fear, John," she had said to me, as we parted; "it is true that I am spied and watched, but Gwenny is too keen for them. While I have my grandfather to prevent all violence; and little Gwenny to keep watch on those who try to watch me; and you above all others, John, ready at a moment, if the worst comes to the worst—this neglected Lorna Doone was never in such case before. Therefore do not squeeze my hand, John;

I am safe without it, and you do not know your strength."

Ah, I knew my strength right well. Hill and valley scarcely seemed to be step and landing for me ; fiercest cattle I would play with, making them go backward, and afraid of hurting them, like John Fry with his terrier ; even rooted trees seemed to me but as sticks I could smite down, except for my love of everything. The love of all things was upon me, and a softness to them all, and a sense of having something even such as they had.

Then the golden harvest came, waving on the broad hill-side, and nestling in the quiet nooks scooped from out the fringe of wood. A wealth of harvest such as never gladdened all our country-side, since my father ceased to reap, and his sickle hung to rust. There had not been a man on Exmoor fit to work that reaping-hook, since the time its owner fell, in the prime of life and strength, before a sterner reaper. But now I took it from the wall, where mother proudly stored it, while she watched me, hardly knowing whether she should smile or cry.

All the parish was assembled in our upper court-yard ; for we were to open the harvest that year, as had been settled with Farmer Nicholas, and with Jasper Kebby, who held the third or little farm. We started in proper order, therefore, as our practice is : first, the parson, Josiah Bowden, wearing his gown and cassock, with the parish Bible in his hand, and a sickle strapped behind him. As he strode along well and

stoutly, being a man of substance, all our family came next, I leading mother with one hand, in the other bearing my father's hook, and with a loaf of our own bread and a keg of cider upon my back. Behind us Annie and Lizzie walked, wearing wreaths of corn-flowers, set out very prettily, such as mother would have worn, if she had been a farmer's wife, instead of a farmer's widow. Being as she was, she had no adornment, except that her widow's hood was off, and her hair allowed to flow, as if she had been a maiden ; and very rich bright hair it was, in spite of all her troubles.

After us, the maidens came, milkmaids and the rest of them, with Betty Muxworthy at their head, scolding even now, because they would not walk fitly. But they only laughed at her ; and she knew it was no good to scold, with all the men behind them.

Then the Snowes came trooping forward ; Farmer Nicholas in the middle, walking as if he would rather walk to a wheatfield of his own, yet content to follow lead, because he knew himself the leader ; and signing every now and then to the people here and there, as if I were nobody. But to see his three great daughters, strong and handsome wenches, making upon either side, as if somebody would run off with them—this was the very thing that taught me how to value Lorna, and her pure simplicity.

After the Snowes, came Jasper Kebby, with his wife new-married ; and a very honest pair they were, upon only a hundred acres, and a right of common. After these the men came hotly, without decent order, trying

to spy the girls in front, and make good jokes about them, at which their wives laughed heartily, being jealous when alone perhaps. And after these men and their wives, came all the children toddling, picking flowers by the way, and chattering and asking questions, as the children will. There must have been three-score of us, take one with one another ; and the lane was full of people. When we were come to the big field-gate, where the first sickle was to be, Parson Bowden heaved up the rail with the sleeves of his gown done green with it ; and he said that everybody might hear him, though his breath was short, “In the name of the Lord, Amen !”

“Amen ! So be it !” cried the clerk, who was far behind, being only a shoemaker.

Then Parson Bowden read some verses from the parish Bible, telling us to lift up our eyes, and look upon the fields already white to harvest ; and then he laid the Bible down on the square head of the gate-post, and despite his gown and cassock, three good swipes he cut of corn, and laid them right end onwards. All this time the rest were huddling outside the gate, and along the lane, not daring to interfere with parson, but whispering how well he did it.

When he had stowed the corn like that, mother entered, leaning on me, and we both said, “Thank the Lord for all His mercies, and these the first fruits of His hand !” And then the clerk gave out a psalm verse by verse, done very well ; although he sneezed in the midst of it, from a beard of wheat thrust up his

nose by the rival cobbler at Brendon. And when the psalm was sung, so strongly that the foxgloves on the bank were shaking, like a chime of bells at it, Parson took a stoup of cider, and we all fell to at reaping.

Of course I mean the men, not women ; although I know that up the country, women are allowed to reap ; and right well they reap it, keeping row for row with men, comely, and in due order, yet, meseems, the men must ill attend to their own reaping-hooks, in fear lest the other cut themselves, being the weaker vessel. But in our part, women do what seems their proper business, following well behind the men, out of harm of the swinging hook, and stooping with their breasts and arms up they catch the swathes of corn, where the reapers cast them, and tucking them together tightly with a wisp laid under them, this they fetch around and twist, with a knee to keep it close ; and lo, there is a goodly sheaf, ready to set up in stooks ! After these the children come, gathering each for his little self, if the farmer be right-minded ; until each hath a bundle made as big as himself and longer, and tumbles now and again with it, in the deeper part of the stubble.

We, the men, kept marching onwards down the flank of the yellow wall, with knees bent wide, and left arm bowed, and right arm flashing steel. Each man in his several place, keeping down the rig or chine, on the right side of the reaper in front, and the left of the man that followed him ; each making further sweep and inroad into the golden breadth and depth, each casting leftwards his rich clearance on his foregoer's double track.

So like half a wedge of wildfowl, to and fro we swept the field ; and when to either hedge we came, sickles wanted whetting, and throats required moistening, and backs were in need of easing, and every man had much to say, and women wanted praising. Then all returned to the other end, with reaping-hooks beneath our arms, and dogs left to mind jackets.

But now, will you believe me well, or will you only laugh at me ? For even in the world of wheat, when deep among the varnished crispness of the jointed stalks, and below the feathered yielding of the graceful heads, even as I gripped the swathes and swept the sickle round them, even as I flung them by to rest on brother stubble, through the whirling yellow world, and eagerness of reaping, came the vision of my love, as with downcast eyes she wondered at my power of passion. And then the sweet remembrance glowed, brighter than the sun through wheat, through my very depth of heart, of how she raised those beaming eyes, and ripened in my breast rich hope. Even now I could descry, like high waves in the distance, the rounded heads and folded shadows of the wood of Bagworthy. Perhaps she was walking in the valley, and softly gazing up at them. Oh, to be a bird just there ! I could see a bright mist hanging just above the Doone Glen. Perhaps it was shedding its drizzle upon her. Oh, to be a drop of rain ! The very breeze which bowed the harvest to my bosom gently, might have come direct from Lorna, with her sweet voice laden. Ah, the flaws of air that wander where they will

around her, fan her bright cheek, play with lashes, even revel in her hair and reveal her beauties—man is but a breath, we know, would I were such breath as that!

But confound it, while I ponder, with delicious dreams suspended, with my right arm hanging frustate and the giant sickle drooped, with my left arm bowed for clasping something more germane than wheat, and my eyes not minding business, but intent on distant woods,—confound it, what are the men about, and why am I left vapouring? They have taken advantage of me, the rogues! They are gone to the hedge for the cider-jars; they have had up the sledd of bread and meat, quite softly over the stubble, and if I can believe my eyes (so dazed with Lorna's image) they are sitting down to an excellent dinner, before the church clock has gone eleven!

“John Fry, you big villain!” I cried, with John hanging up in the air by the scruff of his neck-cloth, but holding still by his knife and fork, and a goose-leg in between his lips, “John Fry, what mean you by this, sir?”

“Latt me dowun, or I can't tell 'e,” John answered, with some difficulty. So I let him come down, and I must confess that he had reason on his side. “Plaise your worship”—John called me so, ever since I returned from London, firmly believing that the King had made me a magistrate at least; though I was to keep it secret—“us zeed as how your worship were took with thinkin' of King's business, in the middle of the whate-rigg; and so us zed, ‘latt un coom to his-

zell, us had better zave taime, by takking our dinner ;' and here us be, plaise your worship, and hopps no offence with thick iron spoon full of vried taties."

I was glad enough to accept the ladle full of fried batatas, and to make the best of things, which is generally done by letting men have their own way. Therefore I managed to dine with them, although it was so early.

For according to all that I can find, in a long life and a varied one, twelve o'clock is the real time for a man to have his dinner. Then the sun is at his noon, calling halt to look around, and then the plants and leaves are turning, each with a little leisure time, before the work of the afternoon. Then is the balance of east and west, and then the right and left side of a man are in due proportion, and contribute fairly with harmonious fluids. And the health of this mode of life, and its reclaiming virtue are well set forth in our ancient rhyme,—

“Sunrise, breakfast; sun high, dinner;
Sundown, sup; makes a saint of a sinner.”

Whish, the wheat falls ! Whirl again ; ye have had good dinners ; give your master and mistress plenty to supply another year. And in truth we did reap well and fairly, through the whole of that afternoon, I not only keeping lead, but keeping the men up to it. We got through a matter of ten acres, ere the sun between the shocks, broke his light on wheaten plumes, then hung his red cloak on the clouds, and fell into grey slumber.

Seeing this we wiped our sickles, and our breasts

and foreheads, and soon were on the homeward road, looking forward to good supper.

Of course all the reapers came at night to the harvest-supper, and Parson Bowden to say the grace as well as help to carve for us. And some help was needed there, I can well assure you ; for the reapers had brave appetites, and most of their wives having babies were forced to eat as a duty. Neither failed they of this duty ; cut and come again was the order of the evening, as it had been of the day ; and I had no time to ask questions, but help meat and ladle gravy. All the while our darling Annie, with her sleeves tucked up, and her comely figure panting, was running about with a bucket of tatties mashed with lard and cabbage. Even Lizzie had left her books, and was serving out beer and cider ; while mother helped plum-pudding largely on pewter plates with the mutton. And all the time, Betty Muxworthy was grunting in and out everywhere, not having space to scold even, but changing the dishes, serving the meat, poking the fire, and cooking more. But John Fry would not stir a peg, except with his knife and fork, having all the airs of a visitor, and his wife to keep him eating, till I thought there would be no end of it.

Then having eaten all they could, they prepared themselves, with one accord, for the business now of drinking. But first they lifted the neck of corn, dressed with ribbons gaily, and set it upon the mantel-piece, each man with his horn a-froth ; and then they sang a song about it, everyone shouting in the chorus louder

than harvest thunderstorm. Some were in the middle of one verse, and some at the end of the next one ; yet somehow all managed to get together in the mighty roar of the burden. And if any farmer up the country would like to know Exmoor harvest-song as sung in my time and will be sung long after I am garnered home, lo here I set it down for him, omitting only the dialect, which perchance might puzzle him.

EXMOOR HARVEST-SONG.

1.

The corn, oh the corn, 'tis the ripening of the corn !
 Go unto the door, my lad, and look beneath the moon,
 Thou canst see, beyond the woodrick, how it is yelloan :
 'Tis the harvesting of wheat, and the barley must be shorn.

(Chorus.)

The corn, oh the corn, and the yellow, mellow corn !
 Here's to the corn, with the cups upon the board !
 We've been reaping all the day, and we'll reap again the morn,
 And fetch it home to mow-yard, and then we'll thank the Lord.

2.

The wheat, oh the wheat, 'tis the ripening of the wheat !
 All the day it has been hanging down its heavy head,
 Bowing over on our bosoms with a beard of red :
 'Tis the harvest, and the value makes the labour sweet.

(Chorus.)

The wheat, oh the wheat, and the golden, golden wheat !
 Here's to the wheat, with the loaves upon the board !
 We've been reaping all the day, and we never will be beat,
 But fetch it all to mow-yard, and then we'll thank the Lord.

3.

The barley, oh the barley, and the barley is in prime !
 All the day it has been rustling with its bristles brown,
 Waiting with its beard abowing, till it can be mown ;
 'Tis the harvest, and the barley must abide its time.

(Chorus.)

The barley, oh the barley, and the barley ruddy brown !
 Here's to the barley, with the beer upon the board !
 We'll go amowing, soon as ever all the wheat is down ;
 When all is in the mow-yard, we'll stop, and thank the Lord.

4.

The oats, oh the oats, 'tis the ripening of the oats !
 All the day they have been dancing with their flakes of white,
 Waiting for the girding-hook, to be the nags' delight :
 'Tis the harvest, let them dangle in their skirted coats.

(*Chorus.*)

The oats, oh the oats, and the silver, silver oats !
 Here's to the oats, with the backstone on the board !
 We'll go among them, when the barley has been laid in rotes :
 When all is home to mow-yard, we'll kneel and thank the Lord.

5.

The corn, oh the corn, and the blessing of the corn !
 Come unto the door, my lads, and look beneath the moon,
 We can see, on hill and valley, how it is yeloon,
 With a breadth of glory, as when our Lord was born.

(*Chorus.*)

The corn, oh the corn, and the yellow, mellow corn !
 Thanks for the corn, with our bread upon the board !
 So shall we acknowledge it, before we reap the morn,
 With our hands to heaven, and our knees unto the Lord.

Now we sang this song very well the first time, having the parish choir to lead us, and the clarionet, and the parson to give us the time with his cup ; and we sang it again the second time, not so but what you might praise it (if you had been with us all the evening), although the parson was gone then, and the clerk not fit to compare with him in the matter of keeping time. But when that song was in its third singing, I defy any man (however sober) to have made out one verse from the other, or even the burden from the verses, inasmuch as every man present, ay and woman too, sang as became convenient to them, in utterance both of words and tune.

And in truth, there was much excuse for them ; because it was a noble harvest, fit to thank the Lord for,

without his thinking us hypocrites. For we had more land in wheat, that year, than ever we had before, and twice the crop to the acre ; and I could not help now and then remembering, in the midst of the merriment, how my father in the churchyard yonder would have gloried to behold it. And my mother, who had left us now, happening to return just then, being called to have her health drunk (for the twentieth time at least), I knew by the sadness in her eyes that she was thinking just as I was. Presently therefore I slipped away from the noise, and mirth, and smoking (although of that last there was not much, except from Farmer Nicholas), and crossing the courtyard in the moonlight, I went, just to cool myself, as far as my father's tombstone.

CHAPTER II.

I HAD long outgrown unwholesome feeling as to my father's death ; and so had Annie ; though Lizzie still (who must have loved him least) entertained some evil will, and longing for a punishment. Therefore I was surprised (and indeed, startled would not be too much to say, the moon being somewhat fleecy) to see our Annie sitting there as motionless as the tombstone, and with all her best fal-lals upon her, after stowing away the dishes.

My nerves however are good and strong, except at least in love matters wherein they always fail me, and when I meet with witches ; and therefore I went up to Annie, although she looked so white and pure ; for I had seen her before with those things on, and it struck me who she was.

“What are you doing here, Annie ?” I enquired rather sternly, being vexed with her for having gone so very near to frighten me.

“Nothing at all,” said our Annie shortly. And indeed it was truth enough for a woman. Not that

I dare to believe that women are such liars as men say; only that I mean they often see things round the corner, and know not which is which of it. And indeed I never have known a woman (though right enough in their meaning) purely and perfectly true and transparent, except only my Lorna; and even so, I might not have loved her, if she had been ugly.

“Why, how so?” said I; “Miss Annie, what business have you here, doing nothing at this time of night? And leaving me with all the trouble to entertain our guests!”

“You seem not to me to be doing it, John,” Annie answered softly; “what business have you here doing nothing, at this time of night?”

I was taken so aback with this, and the extreme impertinence of it, from a mere young girl like Annie, that I turned round to march away and have nothing more to say to her. But she jumped up, and caught me by the hand, and threw herself upon my bosom, with her face all wet with tears.

“Oh John, I will tell you. I will tell you. Only don’t be angry, John.”

“Angry! no indeed,” said I; “what right have I to be angry with you, because you have your secrets? Every chit of a girl thinks now that she has a right to her secrets.”

“And you have none of your own, John; of course you have none of your own? All your going out at night”—

“We will not quarrel here, poor Annie ;” I answered, with some loftiness ; “there are many things upon my mind, which girls can have no notion of.”

“And so there are upon mine, John. Oh John, I will tell you everything, if you will look at me kindly, and promise to forgive me. Oh, I am so miserable !”

Now this, though she was behaving so badly, moved me much towards her ; especially as I longed to know what she had to tell me. Therefore I allowed her to coax me, and to kiss me, and to lead me away a little, as far as the old yew-tree ; for she would not tell me where she was.

But even in the shadow there, she was very long before beginning, and seemed to have two minds about it, or rather perhaps a dozen ; and she laid her cheek against the tree, and sobbed till it was pitiful ; and I knew what mother would say to her, for spoiling her best frock so.

“Now will you stop ?” I said at last, harder than I meant it ; for I knew that she would go on all night, if any one encouraged her : and though not well acquainted with women, I understood my sisters ; or else I must be a born fool—except of course that I never professed to understand Eliza.

“Yes, I will stop,” said Annie panting ; “you are very hard on me, John ; but I know you mean it for the best. If somebody else—I am sure I don’t know who, and have no right to know no doubt, but she must be a wicked thing—if somebody else had been taken so

with a pain all round the heart, John, and no power of telling it, perhaps you would have coaxed, and kissed her, and come a little nearer, and made opportunity to be very loving."

Now this was so exactly what I had tried to do to Lorna, that my breath was almost taken away, at Annie's so describing it. For a while I could not say a word ; but wondered if she were a witch, which had never been in our family : and then, all of a sudden, I saw the way to beat her, with the devil at my elbow.

"From your knowledge of these things, Annie, you must have had them done to you. I demand to know this very moment who has taken such liberties."

"Then, John, you shall never know, if you ask in that manner. Besides it was no liberty in the least at all. Cousins have a right to do things—and when they are one's godfather."— Here Annie stopped quite suddenly, having so betrayed herself ; but met me in the full moonlight, being resolved to face it out, with a good face put upon it.

"Alas, I feared it would come to this," I answered very sadly : "I know he has been here many a time, without showing himself to me. There is nothing meaner than for a man, to sneak, and steal a young maid's heart, without her people knowing it."

"You are not doing anything of that sort, yourself then, dear John, are you ?"

"Only a common highwayman !" I answered, without heeding her ; "a man without an acre of his own,

and liable to hang upon any common, and no other right of common over it" —

"John," said my sister ; "are the Doones privileged not to be hanged upon common land?"

At this I was so thunderstruck, that I leaped in the air like a shot rabbit, and rushed as hard as I could through the gate and across the yard, and back into the kitchen ; and there I asked Farmer Nicholas Snowe to give me some tobacco, and to lend me a spare pipe.

This he did with a grateful manner, being now some five-fourths gone ; and so I smoked the very first pipe that ever had entered my lips till then ; and beyond a doubt it did me good, and spread my heart at leisure.

Meanwhile the reapers were mostly gone, to be up betimes in the morning ; and some were led by their wives ; and some had to lead their wives themselves ; according to the capacity of man and wife respectively. But Betty was as lively as ever, bustling about with everyone, and looking out for the chance of groats, which the better off might be free with. And over the kneading-pan, next day, she dropped three and six-pence out of her pocket ; and Lizzie could not tell for her life how much more might have been in it.

Now by the time I had almost finished smoking that pipe of tobacco, and wondering at myself for having so despised it hitherto, and making up my mind to have another trial to-morrow night, it began to occur to me that although dear Annie had behaved so very badly and rudely, and almost taken my breath away with the

suddenness of her allusion ; yet it was not kind of me to leave her out there at that time of night, all alone, and in such distress. Any of the reapers going home might be gotten so far beyond fear of ghosts, as to venture into the churchyard ; and although they would know a great deal better than to insult a sister of mine when sober, there was no telling what they might do in their present state of rejoicing. Moreover, it was only right that I should learn, for Lorna's sake, how far Annie, or any one else, had penetrated our secret.

Therefore I went forth at once, bearing my pipe in a skilful manner, as I had seen Farmer Nicholas do ; and marking, with a new kind of pleasure, how the rings and wreaths of smoke hovered and fluttered in the moonlight, like a lark upon his carol. Poor Annie was gone back again to our father's grave ; and there she sat upon the turf, sobbing very gently, and not wishing to trouble any one. So I raised her tenderly, and made much of her, and consoled her, for I could not scold her there ; and perhaps after all she was not to be blamed so much as Tom Faggus himself was. Annie was very grateful to me, and kissed me many many times, and begged my pardon ever so often for her rudeness to me. And then having gone so far with it, and finding me so complaisant, she must needs try to go a little further, and to lead me away from her own affairs, and into mine concerning Lorna. But although it was clever enough of her, she was not deep enough for me there ; and I soon discovered that she knew nothing, not even the name of my darling ; but

only suspected from things she had seen, and put together like a woman. Upon this I brought her back again to Tom Faggus and his doings.

“ My poor Annie, have you really promised him to be his wife ? ”

“ Then after all you have no reason, John, no particular reason I mean for slighting poor Sally Snowe so ? ”

“ Without even asking mother or me ! Oh, Annie, it was wrong of you.”

“ But, darling, you know that mother wishes you so much to marry Sally ; and I am sure you could have her to-morrow. She dotes on the very ground ”—

“ I dare say he tells you that, Annie, that he dotes on the ground you walk upon—but did you believe him, child ? ”

“ You may believe me, I assure you, John ; and half the farm to be settled upon her, after the old man’s time ; and though she gives herself little airs, it is only done to entice you ; she has the very best hand in the dairy, John, and the lightest at a turn-over cake ”—

“ Now, Annie, don’t talk nonsense so. I wish just to know the truth, about you, and Tom Faggus. Do you mean to marry him ? ”

“ I to marry before my brother, and leave him with none to take care of him ! Who can do him a red deer collop, except Sally herself, as I can ? Come home, dear, at once, and I will do you one ; for you never ate a morsel of supper, with all the people you had to attend upon.”

This was true enough ; and seeing no chance of anything more than cross questions and crooked purposes, at which a girl was sure to beat me, I even allowed her to lead me home, with the thoughts of the collop uppermost. But I never counted upon being beaten so thoroughly as I was ; for knowing me now to be off my guard, the young hussy stopped at the farm-yard gate, as if with a briar entangling her, and while I was stooping to take it away, she looked me full in the face by the moonlight, and jerked out quite suddenly,

“ Can your love do a collop, John ? ”

“ No, I should hope not,” I answered rashly ; “ she is not a mere cook-maid I should hope.”

“ She is not half so pretty as Sally Snowe ; I will answer for that ; ” said Annie.

“ She is ten thousand times as pretty as ten thousand Sally Snowes ; ” I replied with great indignation.

“ Oh, but look at Sally’s eyes ! ” cried my sister rapturously.

“ Look at Lorna Doone’s ; ” said I ; “ and you would never look again at Sally’s.”

“ Oh, Lorna Doone, Lorna Doone ! ” exclaimed our Annie, half-frightened, yet clapping her hands with triumph, at having found me out so : “ Lorna Doone is the lovely maiden, who has stolen poor somebody’s heart so. Ah, I shall remember it ; because it is so queer a name. But stop, I had better write it down. Lend me your hat, poor boy, to write on.”

“ I have a great mind to lend you a box on the ear,” I answered her in my vexation ; “ and I would,

if you had not been crying so, you sly good-for-nothing baggage. As it is, I shall keep it for Master Faggus, and add interest for keeping."

"Oh no, John; oh no, John," she begged me earnestly, being sobered in a moment. "Your hand is so terribly heavy, John; and he never would forgive you; although he is so good-hearted, he cannot put up with an insult. Promise me, dear John, that you will not strike him; and I will promise you faithfully to keep your secret, even from mother, and even from Cousin Tom himself."

"And from Lizzie; most of all, from Lizzie;" I answered very eagerly, knowing too well which of my relations would be hardest with me.

"Of course from little Lizzie," said Annie, with some contempt; "a young thing like her cannot be kept too long, in my opinion, from the knowledge of such subjects. And besides, I should be very sorry if Lizzie had the right to know your secrets, as I have, dearest John. Not a soul shall be the wiser for your having trusted me, John; although I shall be very wretched when you are late away at night, among those dreadful people."

"Well," I replied, "it is no use crying over spilt milk, Annie. You have my secret, and I have yours; and I scarcely know which of the two is likely to have the worst time of it, when it comes to mother's ears. I could put up with perpetual scolding; but not with mother's sad silence."

"That is exactly how I feel, John;" and as Annie

said it, she brightened up, and her soft eyes shone upon me ; “ but now I shall be much happier, dear ; because I shall try to help you. No doubt, the young lady deserves it, John. She is not after the farm, I hope ? ”

“ She ! ” I exclaimed ; and that was enough ; there was so much scorn in my voice and face.

“ Then, I am sure, I am very glad ; ” Annie always made the best of things ; “ for I do believe that Sally Snowe has taken a fancy to our dairy-place, and the pattern of our cream-pans ; and she asked so much about our meadows, and the colour of the milk ”—

“ Then after all, you were right, dear Annie ; it is the ground she dotes upon ! ”

“ And the things that walk upon it,” she answered me, with another kiss ; “ Sally has taken a wonderful fancy to our best cow, ‘ Nipple pins.’ But she never shall have her now ; what a consolation ! ”

We entered the house quite gently thus, and found farmer Nicholas Snowe asleep, little dreaming how his plans had been overset between us. And then Annie said to me very slyly, between a smile and a blush :

“ Don’t you wish Lorna Doone was here, John, in the parlour along with mother ; instead of those two fashionable milkmaids, as Uncle Ben will call them, and poor stupid Mistress Kebby ? ”

“ That indeed I do, Annie. I must kiss you for only thinking of it. Dear me, it seems as if you had known all about us, for a twelvemonth.”

“ She loves you, with all her heart, John. No doubt about that of course.” And Annie looked up at me,

as much as to say, she would like to know who could help it.

“That’s the very thing she won’t do,” said I, knowing that Annie would love me all the more for it; “she is only beginning to like me, Annie; and as for loving, she is so young that she only loves her grandfather. But I hope she will come to it, by-and-by.”

“Of course she must,” replied my sister; “it will be impossible for her to help it.”

“Ah well! I don’t know,” for I wanted more assurance of it. “Maidens are such wondrous things!”

“Not a bit of it,” said Annie, casting her bright eyes downwards: “love is as simple as milking; when people know how to do it. But you must not let her alone too long; that is my advice to you. What a simpleton you must have been not to tell me long ago. I would have made Lorna wild about you, long before this time, Johnny. But now you go into the parlour, dear, while I do your collop. Faith Snowe is not come, but Polly and Sally. Sally has made up her mind to conquer you, this very blessed evening, John. Only look what a thing of a scarf she has on; I should be quite ashamed to wear it. But you won’t strike poor Tom, will you?”

“Not I, my darling, for your sweet sake.”

And so dear Annie, having grown quite brave, gave me a little push into the parlour, where I was quite abashed to enter, after all I had heard about Sally. And I made up my mind to examine her well, and try a little courting with her, if she should lead me on,

that I might be in practice for Lorna. But when I perceived how grandly and richly both the young damsels were apparelled ; and how, in their courtesies to me, they retreated, as if I were making up to them, in a way they had learned from Exeter ; and how they began to talk of the Court, as if they had been there all their lives, and the latest mode of the Duchess of this, and the profile of the Countess of that, and the last good saying of my Lord something ; instead of butter, and cream, and eggs, and things which they understood ; I knew there must be somebody in the room, besides Jasper Kebby to talk at.

And so there was ; for behind the curtain drawn across the window-seat, no less a man than Uncle Ben was sitting half asleep and weary ; and by his side a little girl very quiet and very watchful. My mother led me to Uncle Ben, and he took my hand without rising, inuttering something not over polite, about my being bigger than ever. I asked him heartily how he was, and he said, “Well enough, for that matter ; but none the better for the noise you great clods have been making.”

“I am sorry if we have disturbed you, sir,” I answered very civilly ; “but I knew not that you were here even ; and you must allow for harvest time.”

“So it seems,” he replied ; “and allow a great deal, including waste and drunkenness. Now (if you can see so small a thing, after emptying flagons much larger) this is my granddaughter, and my heiress”—here he glanced at mother—“my heiress, little Ruth Huckaback.”

“ I am very glad to see you, Ruth ; ” I answered, offering her my hand, which she seemed afraid to take ; “ welcome to Plover’s Barrows, my good cousin Ruth.”

However my good cousin Ruth only arose, and made me a courtesy, and lifted her great brown eyes at me, more in fear, as I thought, than kinship. And if ever any one looked unlike the heiress to great property, it was the little girl before me.

“ Come out to the kitchen, dear, and let me chuck you to the ceiling,” I said, just to encourage her ; “ I always do it to little girls ; and then they can see the hams and bacon.” But Uncle Reuben burst out laughing ; and Ruth turned away with a deep rich colour.

“ Do you know how old she is, you numskull ? ” said Uncle Ben, in his driest drawl ; “ she was seventeen last July, sir.”

“ On the first of July, grandfather,” Ruth whispered, with her back still to me ; “ but many people will not believe it.”

Here mother came up to my rescue, as she always loved to do ; and she said, “ If my son may not dance Miss Ruth, at any rate he may dance with her. We have only been waiting for you, dear John, to have a little harvest dance, with the kitchen door thrown open. You take Ruth ; Uncle Ben take Sally ; Master Kebby pair off with Polly ; and neighbour Nicholas will be good enough, if I can awake him, to stand up with fair Mistress Kebby. Lizzie will play us the virginal. Won’t you, Lizzie dear ? ”

“But who is to dance with you, madam?” uncle Ben asked, very politely. “I think you must rearrange your figure. I have not danced for a score of years; and I will not dance now, while the mistress and the owner of the harvest sits aside neglected.”

“Nay, Master Huckaback,” cried Sally Snowe, with a saucy toss of her hair; “Mistress Ridd is too kind a great deal, in handing you over to me. You take her; and I will fetch Annie to be my partner this evening. I like dancing very much better with girls, for they never squeeze and rumple one. Oh it is so much nicer!”

“Have no fear for me, my dears,” our mother answered smiling: “Parson Bowden promised to come back again: I expect him every minute; and he intends to lead me off, and to bring a partner for Annie too, a very pretty young gentleman. Now begin; and I will join you.”

There was no disobeying her, without rudeness; and indeed the girls’ feet were already jiggling; and Lizzie giving herself wonderful airs with a roll of learned music; and even while Annie was doing my collop, her pretty round instep was arching itself, as I could see from the parlour-door. So I took little Ruth, and I spun her around, as the sound of the music came lively and ringing; and after us came all the rest with much laughter, begging me not to jump over her; and anon my grave partner began to smile sweetly, and look up at me with the brightest of eyes, and drop me the prettiest courtesies; till I thought

what a great stupe I must have been to dream of putting her in the cheese-rack. But one thing I could not at all understand ; why mother, who used to do all in her power to throw me across Sally Snowe, should now do the very opposite ; for she would not allow me one moment with Sally, not even to cross in the dance, or whisper, or go anywhere near a corner (which, as I said, I intended to do, just by way of practice) ; while she kept me, all the evening, as close as possible with Ruth Huckaback, and came up and praised me so to Ruth, times and again, that I declare I was quite ashamed. Although of course I knew that I deserved it all : but I could not well say that.

Then Annie came sailing down the dance, with her beautiful hair flowing round her ; the lightest figure in all the room, and the sweetest, and the loveliest. She was blushing, with her fair cheeks red beneath her dear blue eyes, as she met my glance of surprise and grief at the partner she was leaning on. It was Squire Marwood de Whichehalse. I would sooner have seen her with Tom Faggus, as indeed I had expected, when I heard of Parson Bowden. And to me it seemed, that she had no right to be dancing so with any other ; and to this effect I contrived to whisper ; but she only said, “ See to yourself, John. No, but let us both enjoy ourselves. You are not dancing with Lorna, John. But you seem uncommonly happy.”

“ Tush,” I said ; “ could I flip about so, if I had my love with me ? ”

CHAPTER III.

WE kept up the dance very late that night, mother being in such wonderful spirits, that she would not hear of our going to bed: while she glanced from young Squire Marwood, very deep in his talk with our Annie, to me and Ruth Huckaback who were beginning to be very pleasant company. Alas poor mother, so proud as she was, how little she dreamed that her good schemes already were hopelessly going awry.

Being forced to be up before daylight next day, in order to begin right early, I would not go to my bedroom that night for fear of disturbing my mother, but determined to sleep in the tallat awhile, that place being cool, and airy, and refreshing with the smell of sweet hay. Moreover, after my dwelling in town, where I had felt like a horse on a lime-kiln, I could not for a length of time have enough of country life. The mooing of a calf was music, and the chuckle of a fowl was wit, and the snore of the horses was news to me.

“Wult have thee own wai, I rackon,” said Betty, being cross with sleepiness, for she had washed up everything; “slape in hog-pound, if thee laikes, Jan.”

Letting her have the last word of it (as is the due of women) I stood in the court, and wondered awhile at the glory of the harvest moon, and the yellow world it shone upon. Then I saw, as sure as ever I was standing there in the shadow of the stable, I saw a short wide figure glide across the foot of the courtyard, between me and the six-barred gate. Instead of running after it, as I should have done, I began to consider who it could be, and what on earth was doing there, when all our people were in bed, and the reapers gone home, or to the linhay close against the wheatfield.

Having made up my mind at last, that it could be none of our people—though not a dog was barking—and also that it must have been either a girl or a woman, I ran down with all speed to learn what might be the meaning of it. But I came too late to learn, through my own hesitation; for this was the lower end of the courtyard, not the approach from the parish highway, but the end of the sledd-way across the fields where the brook goes down to the Lynn stream, and where Squire Faggus had saved the old drake. And of course the dry channel of the brook, being scarcely any water now, afforded plenty of place to hide, leading also to a little coppice, beyond our cabbage-garden, and so further on to the parish highway.

I saw at once that it was vain to make any pursuit by moonlight ; and resolving to hold my own counsel about it (though puzzled not a little) and to keep watch there another night, back I returned to the tall-al-ladder, and slept without leaving off till morning.

Now many people may wish to know, as indeed I myself did very greatly, what had brought Master Huckaback over from Dulverton, at that time of year ; when the clothing business was most active on account of harvest wages, and when the new wheat was beginning to sample from the early parts up the country (for he meddled as well in corn-dealing) and when we could not attend to him properly by reason of our occupation. And yet more surprising it seemed to me that he should have brought his granddaughter also ; instead of the troop of dragoons, without which he had vowed he would never come here again. And how he had managed to enter the house, together with his granddaughter, and be sitting quite at home in the parlour there, without any knowledge or even suspicion on my part. That last question was easily solved, for mother herself had admitted them by means of the little passage ; during a chorus of the harvest-song which might have drowned an earthquake : but as for his meaning and motive, and apparent neglect of his business, none but himself could interpret them ; and as he did not see fit to do so, we could not be rude enough to enquire.

He seemed in no hurry to take his departure, though his visit was so inconvenient to us, as himself indeed must have noticed : and presently Lizzie, who was the

sharpest among us, said in my hearing that she believed he had purposely timed his visit so that he might have liberty to pursue his own object, whatsoever it were, without interruption from us. Mother gazed hard upon Lizzie at this, having formed a very different opinion ; but Annie and myself agreed that it was worth looking into.

Now how could we look into it, without watching Uncle Reuben, whenever he went abroad, and trying to catch him in his speech, when he was taking his ease at night ? For, in spite of all the disgust with which he had spoken of harvest wassailing, there was not a man coming into our kitchen who liked it better than he did ; only in a quiet way, and without too many witnesses. Now to endeavour to get at the purpose of any guest, even a treacherous one (which we had no right to think Uncle Reuben) by means of observing him in his cups, is a thing which even the lowest of people would regard with abhorrence. And to my mind it was not clear whether it would be fair play at all to follow a visitor even at a distance from home and clear of our premises ; except for the purpose of fetching him back, and giving him more to go on with. Nevertheless we could not but think, the times being wild and disjointed, that Uncle Ben was not using fairly the part of a guest in our house, to make long expeditions we knew not whither, and involve us in trouble we knew not what.

For his mode was directly after breakfast to pray to the Lord a little (which used not to be his practice), and

then to go forth upon Dolly, the which was our Annie's pony, very quiet and respectful, with a bag of good victuals hung behind him, and two great cavalry pistols in front. And he always wore his meanest clothes, as if expecting to be robbed, or to disarm the temptation thereto; and he never took his golden chronometer, neither his bag of money. So much the girls found out and told me (for I was never at home myself by day); and they very craftily spurred me on, having less noble ideas perhaps, to hit upon Uncle Reuben's track, and follow, and see what became of him. For he never returned until dark or more, just in time to be in before us, who were coming home from the harvest. And then Dolly always seemed very weary, and stained with a muck from beyond our parish.

But I refused to follow him, not only for the loss of a day's work to myself, and at least half a day to the other men, but chiefly because I could not think that it would be upright and manly. It was all very well to creep warily into the valley of the Doones, and heed everything around me, both because they were public enemies, and also because I risked my life at every step I took there. But as to tracking a feeble old man (however subtle he might be), a guest moreover of our own, and a relative through my mother—"Once for all," I said, "it is below me, and I won't do it."

Thereupon, the girls, knowing my way, ceased to torment me about it: but what was my astonishment the very next day to perceive that instead of fourteen reapers, we were only thirteen left, directly our break-

fast was done with—or mowers rather I should say, for we were gone into the barley now.

“Who has been and left his scythe?” I asked; “and here’s a tin cup never handled!”

“Whoy, dudn’t ee knaw, Maister Jan,” said Bill Dadds, looking at me queerly, “as Jan Vry wur gane avore braxvass.”

“Oh, very well,” I answered, “John knows what he is doing.” For John Fry was a kind of foreman now, and it would not do to say anything that might lessen his authority. However, I made up my mind to rope him, when I should catch him by himself, without peril to his dignity.

But when I came home in the evening, late and almost weary, there was no Annie cooking my supper, nor Lizzie by the fire reading, nor even little Ruth Huckaback watching the shadows and pondering. Upon this, I went to the girls’ room, not in the very best of tempers; and there I found all three of them in the little place set apart for Annie, eagerly listening to John Fry, who was telling some great adventure. John had a great jug of ale beside him, and a horn well drained; and he clearly looked upon himself as a hero, and the maids seemed to be of the same opinion.

“Well done, John,” my sister was saying, “captally done, John Fry. How very brave you have been, John. Now quick, let us hear the rest of it.”

“What does all this nonsense mean?” I said, in a voice which frightened them, as I could see by the

light of our own mutton candles : "John Fry, you be off to your wife at once, or you shall have what I owe you now, instead of to-morrow morning."

John made no answer, but scratched his head, and looked at the maidens to take his part.

"It is you that must be off, I think," said Lizzie, looking straight at me with all the impudence in the world : "what right have you to come in here to the young ladies' room, without an invitation even?"

"Very well, Miss Lizzie, I suppose mother has some right here." And with that, I was going away to fetch her, knowing that she always took my side, and never would allow the house to be turned upside down in that manner. But Annie caught hold of me by the arm, and little Ruth stood in the doorway ; and Lizzie said, "Don't be a fool, John. We know things of you, you know ; a great deal more than you dream of."

Upon this I glanced at Annie, to learn whether she had been telling, but her pure true face reassured me at once, and then she said very gently—

"Lizzie, you talk too fast, my child. No one knows anything of our John, which he need be ashamed of ; and working as he does from light to dusk, and earning the living of all of us, he is entitled to choose his own good time for going out and for coming in, without consulting a little girl five years younger than himself. Now, John, sit down, and you shall know all that we have done, though I doubt whether you will approve of it."

Upon this, I kissed Annie, and so did Ruth; and John Fry looked a deal more comfortable, but Lizzie only made a face at us. Then Annie began, as follows—

“ You must know, dear John, that we have been extremely curious, ever since Uncle Reuben came, to know what he was come for, especially at this time of year, when he is at his busiest. He never vouchsafed any explanation, neither gave any reason, true or false, which shows his entire ignorance of all feminine nature. If Ruth had known, and refused to tell us, we should have been much easier, because we must have got it out of Ruth before two or three days were over. But darling Ruth knew no more than we did; and indeed I must do her the justice to say that she has been quite as inquisitive. Well, we might have put up with it, if it had not been for his taking Dolly, my own pet Dolly, away every morning, quite as if she belonged to him, and keeping her out until close upon dark, and then bringing her home in a frightful condition. And he even had the impudence, when I told him that Dolly was my pony, to say that we owed him a pony, ever since you took from him that little horse, upon which you found him strapped so snugly; and he means to take Dolly to Dulverton with him, to run in his little cart. If there is law in the land, he shall not. Surely, John, you will not let him?”

“ That I won’t,” said I, “ except upon the conditions which I offered him once before. If we owe him the pony, we owe him the straps.”

Sweet Annie laughed, like a bell, at this, and then she went on with her story.

“ Well, John, we were perfectly miserable. You cannot understand it, of course ; but I used to go every evening, and hug poor Dolly, and kiss her, and beg her to tell me where she had been, and what she had seen, that day. But never having belonged to Balaam, darling Dolly was quite unsuccessful, though often she strove to tell me, with her ears down, and both eyes rolling. Then I made John Fry tie her tail in a knot, with a piece of white ribbon, as if for adornment, that I might trace her among the hills, at any rate for a mile or two. But Uncle Ben was too deep for that ; he cut off the ribbon before he started, saying he would have no Doones after him. And then, in despair, I applied to you, knowing how quick of foot you are, and I got Ruth and Lizzie to help me, but you answered us very shortly ; and a very poor supper you had that night, according to your deserts.

“ But though we were dashed to the ground for a time, we were not wholly discomfited. Our determination to know all about it seemed to increase with the difficulty. And Uncle Ben’s manner last night was so dry, when we tried to romp and to lead him out, that it was much worse than Jamaica ginger grated into a poor sprayed finger. So we sent him to bed at the earliest moment, and held a small council upon him. If you remember, you, John, having now taken to smoke (which is a hateful practice) had gone forth

grumbling about your bad supper, and not taking it as a good lesson."

"Why, Annie," I cried, in amazement at this, "I will never trust you again for a supper. I thought you were so sorry."

"And so I was, dear; very sorry. But still, we must do our duty. And when we came to consider it, Ruth was the cleverest of us all; for she said that surely we must have some man we could trust about the farm to go on a little errand; and then I remembered that old John Fry would do anything for money."

"Not for money, plaize, miss," said John Fry, taking a pull at the beer; "but for the love o' your swate faice."

"To be sure, John; with the King's behind it. And so Lizzie ran for John Fry at once, and we gave him full directions, how he was to slip out of the barley in the confusion of the breakfast, so that none might miss him; and to run back to the black combe bottom, and there he would find the very same pony which Uncle Ben had been tied upon, and there is no faster upon the farm. And then, without waiting for any breakfast unless he could eat it either running or trotting, he was to travel all up the black combe, by the track Uncle Reuben had taken; and up at the top to look forward carefully, and so to trace him without being seen."

"Ay; and raight wull a doo'd un," John cried, with his mouth in the bullock's horn.

“ Well, and what did you see, John ? ” I asked, with great anxiety ; though I meant to have shown no interest.

“ John was just at the very point of it,” Lizzie answered me sharply, “ when you chose to come in and stop him.”

“ Then let him begin again,” said I ; “ things being gone so far, it is now my duty to know everything, for the sake of you girls and mother.”

“ Hem ! ” cried Lizzie, in a nasty way ; but I took no notice of her, for she was always bad to deal with. Therefore John Fry began again, being heartily glad to do so, that his story might get out of the tumble which all our talk had made in it. But as he could not tell a tale in the manner of my Lorna (although he told it very well for those who understood him) I will take it from his mouth altogether, and state in brief what happened.

When John, upon his forest pony, which he had much ado to hold (its mouth being like a bucket), was come to the top of the long black combe, two miles or more from Plover’s Barrows, and winding to the southward, he stopped his little nag short of the crest and got off and looked ahead of him, from behind a tump of whortles. It was a long flat sweep of moorland over which he was gazing, with a few bogs here and there, and brushy places round them. Of course, John Fry, from his shepherd life and reclaiming of strayed cattle, knew as well as need be where he was, and the spread of the hills before him, although it was beyond our

beat, or, rather, I should say beside it. Not but what we might have grazed there had it been our pleasure, but that it was not worth our while, and scarcely worth Jasper Kebby's even ; all the land being cropped (as one might say) with desolation. And nearly all our knowledge of it sprang from the unaccountable tricks of cows who have young calves with them ; at which time they have wild desire to get away from the sight of man, and keep calf and milk for one another, although it be in a barren land. At least, our cows have gotten this trick, and I have heard other people complain of it.

John Fry, as I said, knew the place well enough, but he liked it none the more for that, neither did any of our people ; and, indeed, all the neighbourhood of Thomshill and Larksborough, and most of all Black Barrow Down lay under grave imputation of having been enchanted with a very evil spell. Moreover, it was known, though folk were loth to speak of it, even on a summer morning, that Squire Thom who had been murdered there, a century ago or more, had been seen by several shepherds, even in the middle day, walking with his severed head carried in his left hand, and his right arm lifted towards the sun.

Therefore it was very bold in John (as I acknowledged) to venture across that moor alone, even with a fast pony under him, and some whiskey by his side. And he would never have done so (of that I am quite certain) either for the sake of Annie's sweet face, or of the golden guinea, which the three maidens had sub-

scribed to reward his skill and valour. But the truth was that he could not resist his own great curiosity. For, carefully spying across the moor, from behind the tuft of whortles, at first he could discover nothing having life and motion, except three or four wild cattle roving in vain search for nourishment, and a diseased sheep banished hither, and some carrion crows keeping watch on her. But when John was taking his very last look, being only too glad to go home again, and acknowledge himself baffled, he thought he saw a figure moving in the furthest distance upon Black Barrow Down, scarcely a thing to be sure of yet, on account of the want of colour. But as he watched, the figure passed between him and a naked cliff, and appeared to be a man on horseback, making his way very carefully, in fear of bogs and serpents. For all about there it is adders' ground, and large black serpents dwell in the marshes, and can swim as well as crawl.

John knew that the man who was riding there could be none but Uncle Reuben, for none of the Doones ever passed that way, and the shepherds were afraid of it. And now it seemed an unkid place for an unarmed man to venture through, especially after an armed one who might not like to be spied upon, and must have some dark object in visiting such drear solitudes. Nevertheless John Fry so ached with unbearable curiosity, to know what an old man, and a stranger, and a rich man, and a peaceable could possibly be after in that mysterious manner. Moreover John so throbbed with hope to find some wealthy

secret, that come what would of it he resolved to go to the end of the matter.

Therefore he only waited awhile for fear of being discovered, till Master Huckaback turned to the left and entered a little gully, whence he could not survey the moor. Then John remounted and crossed the rough land and the stony places, and picked his way among the morasses as fast as ever he dared to go; until, in about half-an-hour he drew nigh the entrance of the gully. And now it behoved him to be most wary; for Uncle Ben might have stopped in there, either to rest his horse or having reached the end of his journey. And in either case, John had little doubt that he himself would be pistolled, and nothing more ever heard of him. Therefore he made his pony come to the mouth of it sideways, and leaned over and peered in around the rocky corner, while the little horse cropped at the briars.

But he soon perceived that the gully was empty, so far at least as its course was straight; and with that he hastened into it, though his heart was not working easily. When he had traced the winding hollow for half-a-mile or more, he saw that it forked, and one part led to the left up a steep red bank, and the other to the right, being narrow, and slightly tending downwards. Some yellow sand lay here and there between the starving grasses, and this he examined narrowly for a trace of Master Huckaback.

At last he saw that, beyond all doubt, the man he was pursuing had taken the course which led down

hill ; and down the hill he must follow him. And this John did with deep misgivings, and a hearty wish that he had never started upon so perilous an errand. For now he knew not where he was, and scarcely dared to ask himself, having heard of a horrible hole, somewhere in this neighbourhood, called the “ Wizard’s Slough.” Therefore John rode down the slope, with sorrow, and great caution. And these grew more as he went onward, and his pony reared against him, being scared, although a native of the roughest moorland. And John had just made up his mind that God meant this for a warning, as the passage seemed darker and deeper, when suddenly he turned a corner, and saw a scene which stopped him.

For there was the Wizard’s Slough itself, as black as death, and bubbling, with a few scant yellow reeds in a ring around it. Outside these, bright water-grass of the liveliest green was creeping, tempting any unwary foot to step, and plunge, and founder. And on the marge were blue campanula, sundew, and forget-me-not, such as no child could resist. On either side, the hill fell back, and the ground was broken with tufts of rush, and flag, and marestail, and a few rough alder-trees overclogged with water. And not a bird was seen, or heard, neither rail nor water-hen, wag-tail nor reed-warbler.

Of this horrible quagmire, the worst upon all Exmoor, John had heard from his grandfather, and even from his mother, when they wanted to keep him quiet ; but his father had feared to speak of it to him, being

a man of piety, and up to the tricks of the evil one. This made John the more desirous to have a good look at it now, only with his girths well up, to turn away and flee at speed, if anything should happen. And now he proved how well it is to be wary and wide-awake, even in lonesome places. For at the other side of the Slough, and a few landyards beyond it, where the ground was less noisome, he had observed a felled tree lying over a great hole in the earth, with staves of wood, and slabs of stone, and some yellow gravel around it. But the flags of reeds around the morass partly screened it from his eyes, and he could not make out the meaning of it, except that it meant no good, and probably was witchcraft. Yet Dolly seemed not to be harmed by it ; for there she was as large as life, tied to a stump not far beyond, and flipping the flies away with her tail.

While John was trembling within himself, lest Dolly should get scent of his pony, and neigh and reveal their presence, although she could not see them ; suddenly to his great amazement something white arose out of the hole, under the brown trunk of the tree. Seeing this his blood went back within him ; yet was he not able to turn and flee, but rooted his face in among the loose stones, and kept his quivering shoulders back, and prayed to God to protect him. However, the white thing itself was not so very awful, being nothing more than a long-coned night-cap with a tassel on the top, such as criminals wear at hanging-time. But when John saw

a man's face under it, and a man's neck and shoulders, slowly rising out of the pit, he could not doubt that this was the place where the murderers come to life again, according to the Exmoor story. He knew that a man had been hanged last week, and that this was the ninth day after it.

Therefore he could bear no more, thoroughly brave as he had been ; neither did he wait to see what became of the gallows-man ; but climbed on his horse with what speed he might, and rode away at full gallop. Neither did he dare go back by the way he came, fearing to face Black Barrow Down ; therefore he struck up the other track leading away towards Cloven Rocks, and after riding hard for an hour and drinking all his whiskey, he luckily fell in with a shepherd, who led him on to a public-house somewhere near Exeford. And here he was so unmanned, the excitement being over, that nothing less than a gallon of ale and half a gammon of bacon, brought him to his right mind again. And he took good care to be home before dark, having followed a well-known sheep track.

When John Fry had finished his story at last, after many exclamations from Annie, and from Lizzie, and much praise of his gallantry, yet some little disappointment that he had not stayed there a little longer, while he was about it, so as to be able to tell us more ; I said to him very sternly—

“ Now, John, you have dreamed half this, my man. I firmly believe that you fell asleep at the top of the black combe, after drinking all your whiskey, and

never went on the moor at all. You know what a liar you are, John."

The girls were exceeding angry at this, and laid their hands before my mouth; but I waited for John to answer, with my eyes fixed upon him steadfastly.

"Bain't for me to denai," said John, looking at me very honestly; "but what a maight tull a lai, now and awhiles, zame as other men doth, and most of arl them as spaks again it; but this here be no lai, Maister Jan. I wush to God it wor, boy: a maight slape this naight the better."

"I believe you speak the truth, John; and I ask your pardon. Now not a word to any one, about this strange affair. There is mischief brewing, I can see; and it is my place to attend to it. Several things come across me now—only I will not tell you."

They were not at all contented with this; but I would give them no better; except to say, when they plagued me greatly, and vowed to sleep at my door all night—

"Now, my dears, this is foolish of you. Too much of this matter is known already. It is for your own dear sakes that I am bound to be cautious. I have an opinion of my own; but it may be a very wrong one; I will not ask you to share it with me; neither will I make you inquisitive."

Annie pouted, and Lizzie frowned, and Ruth looked at me with her eyes wide open, but no other mark of regarding me. And I saw that if any one of the three (for John Fry was gone home with the trembles) could be trusted to keep a secret, that one was Ruth Huckaback.

CHAPTER IV.

THE story told by John Fry that night, and my conviction of its truth, made me very uneasy, especially as following upon the warning of Judge Jeffreys, and the hints received from Jeremy Stickles, and the outburst of the tanner at Dunster, as well as sundry tales and rumours, and signs of secret understanding, seen and heard on market-days, and at places of entertainment. We knew for certain that at Taunton, Bridgewater, and even Dulverton, there was much disaffection towards the King, and regret for the days of the Puritans. Albeit I had told the truth, and the pure and simple truth, when, upon my examination, I had assured his lordship, that to the best of my knowledge there was nothing of the sort with us.

But now I was beginning to doubt whether I might not have been mistaken ; especially when we heard, as we did, of arms being landed at Lynmouth, in the dead of the night, and of the tramp of men having reached some one's ears, from a hill where a famous

echo was. For it must be plain to any conspirator (without the example of the Doones) that for the secret muster of men, and the stowing of unlawful arms, and communication by beacon lights, scarcely a fitter place could be found than the wilds of Exmoor, with deep ravines running far inland from an unwatched and mostly a sheltered sea. For the channel from Countisbury Foreland up to Minehead, or even further, though rocky, and gusty, and full of currents, is safe from great rollers and the sweeping power of the south-west storms, which prevail with us more than all the others, and make sad work on the opposite coast.

But even supposing it probable that something against King Charles the Second (or rather against his Roman advisers, and especially his brother) were now in preparation amongst us, was it likely that Master Huckaback, a wealthy man, and a careful one, known moreover to the Lord Chief Justice, would have anything to do with it? To this I could make no answer; Uncle Ben was so close a man, so avaricious, and so revengeful, that it was quite impossible to say what course he might pursue, without knowing all the chances of gain, or rise, or satisfaction to him. That he hated the Papists, I knew full well, though he never spoke much about them; also that he had followed the march of Oliver Cromwell's army, but more as a suttler (people said) than as a real soldier; and that he would go a long way, and risk a great deal of money, to have his

revenge on the Doones; although their name never passed his lips during the present visit.

But how was it likely to be, as to the Doones themselves? Which side would they probably take in the coming movement, if movement indeed, it would be? So far as they had any religion at all, by birth they were Roman Catholics—so much I knew from Lorna; and indeed it was well known all around, that a priest had been fetched more than once to the valley, to soothe some poor outlaw's departure. On the other hand, they were not likely to entertain much affection for the son of the man who had banished them and confiscated their property. And it was not at all impossible that desperate men, such as they were, having nothing to lose, but estates to recover, and not being held by religion much, should cast away all regard for the birth from which they had been cast out, and make common cause with a Protestant rising, for the chance of revenge and replacement.

However I do not mean to say that all these things occurred to me, as clearly as I have set them down; only that I was in general doubt, and very sad perplexity. For mother was so warm, and innocent, and so kind to every one, that knowing some little by this time of the English constitution, I feared very greatly lest she should be punished for harbouring malcontents. As well as possible I knew, that if any poor man came to our door, and cried, "Officers are after me; for God's sake take and hide me," mother

would take him in at once, and conceal, and feed him; even though he had been very violent: and to tell the truth, so would both my sisters, and so indeed would I do. Whence it will be clear that we were not the sort of people to be safe among disturbances.

Before I could quite make up my mind how to act in this difficulty, and how to get at the rights of it (for I would not spy after Uncle Reuben, though I felt no great fear of the Wizard's Slough, and none of the man with white night-cap), a difference came again upon it, and a change of chances. For Uncle Ben went away as suddenly as he first had come to us, giving no reason for his departure, neither claiming the pony, and indeed leaving something behind him of great value to my mother. For he begged her to see to his young grand-daughter, until he could find opportunity of fetching her safely to Dulverton. Mother was overjoyed at this, as she could not help displaying; and Ruth was quite as much delighted, although she durst not show it. For at Dulverton she had to watch and keep such ward on the victuals, and the in and out of the shopmen, that it went entirely against her heart, and she never could enjoy herself. Truly she was an altered girl from the day she came to us; catching our unsuspicuous manners, and our free good-will, and hearty noise of laughing.

By this time, the harvest being done, and the thatching of the ricks made sure against south-

western tempests, and all the reapers being gone, with good money and thankfulness, I began to burn in spirit for the sight of Lorna. I had begged my sister Annie to let Sally Snowe know, once for all, that it was not in my power to have anything more to do with her. Of course our Annie was not to grieve Sally, neither to let it appear for a moment that I suspected her kind views upon me ; and her strong regard for our dairy : only I thought it right upon our part not to waste Sally's time any longer, being a handsome wench as she was, and many young fellows glad to marry her.

And Annie did this uncommonly well, as she herself told me afterwards, having taken Sally in the sweetest manner into her pure confidence, and opened half her bosom to her, about my very sad love affair. Not that she let Sally know, of course, who it was, or what it was ; only that she made her understand, without hinting at any desire of it, that there was no chance now of having me. Sally changed colour a little at this, and then went on about a red cow which had passed seven needles at milking time.

Inasmuch as there are two sorts of month well recognised by the calendar, to wit the lunar and the solar, I made bold to regard both my months, in the absence of any provision, as intended to be strictly lunar. Therefore upon the very day when the eight weeks were expiring, forth I went in search of Lorna, taking the pearl ring hopefully, and all the new-laid eggs I could find, and a dozen and a half of small trout

from our brook. And the pleasure it gave me to catch those trout, thinking as every one came forth and danced upon the grass, how much she would enjoy him, is more than I can now describe, although I well remember it. And it struck me that after accepting my ring, and saying how much she loved me, it was possible that my Queen might invite me even to stay and sup with her: and so I arranged with dear Annie beforehand, who now was the greatest comfort to me, to account for my absence if I should be late.

But alas, I was utterly disappointed; for although I waited and waited for hours, with an equal amount both of patience and peril, no Lorna ever appeared at all, nor even the faintest sign of her. And another thing occurred as well, which vexed me more than it need have done, for so small a matter. And this was that my little offering of the trout and the new-laid eggs was carried off in the coolest manner by that vile Carver Doone. For thinking to keep them the fresher and nicer, away from so much handling, I laid them in a little bed of reeds by the side of the water, and placed some dock-leaves over them. And when I had quite forgotten about them, and was watching from my hiding-place beneath the willow-tree (for I liked not to enter Lorna's bower, without her permission; except just to peep that she was not there), and while I was turning the ring in my pocket, having just seen the new moon, I became aware of a great man coming leisurely down the valley. He

had a broad-brimmed hat, and a leather jerkin, and heavy jack boots to his middle thigh, and what was worst of all for me, on his shoulder he bore a long carbine. Having nothing to meet him withal but my staff, and desiring to avoid disturbance, I retired promptly into the chasm, keeping the tree betwixt us that he might not descry me, and watching from behind the jut of a rock, where now I had scraped myself a neat little hole for the purpose.

Presently the great man reappeared, being now within fifty yards of me, and the light still good enough, as he drew nearer, for me to descry his features: and though I am not a judge of men's faces, there was something in his which turned me cold, as though with a kind of horror. Not that it was an ugly face; nay, rather it seemed a handsome one, so far as mere form and line might go, full of strength, and vigour, and will, and steadfast resolution. From the short black hair above the broad forehead, to the long black beard descending below the curt bold chin, there was not any curve or glimpse of weakness or of after-thought. Nothing playful, nothing pleasant, nothing with a track for smiles; nothing which a friend could like, and laugh at him for having. And yet he might have been a good man (for I have known very good men so fortified by their own strange ideas of God): I say that he might have seemed a good man, but for the cold and cruel hankering of his steel-blue eyes.

Now let no one suppose for a minute that I saw all this in a moment; for I am very slow, and take a long

time to digest things ; only I like to set down, and have done with it, all the results of my knowledge, though they be not manifold. But what I said to myself, just then, was no more than this : “ What a fellow to have Lorna ! ” Having my sense of right so outraged (although, of course, I would never allow her to go so far as that), I almost longed that he might thrust his head in to look after me. For there I was, with my ash staff clubbed, ready to have at him, and not ill inclined to do so ; if only he would come where strength, not fire-arms, must decide it. However he suspected nothing of my dangerous neighbourhood ; but walked his round like a sentinel, and turned at the brink of the water.

Then as he marched back again, along the margin of the stream, he espied my little hoard, covered up with dock-leaves. He saw that the leaves were upside down, and this of course drew his attention. I saw him stoop, and lay bare the fish, and the eggs set a little away from them ; and in my simple heart, I thought that now he knew all about me. But to my surprise, he seemed well-pleased ; and his harsh short laughter came to me, without echo.

“ Ha, ha ! Charlie boy ! Fisherman Charlie, have I caught thee setting bait for Lorna ? Now I understand thy fishings, and the robbing of Counsellor’s hen-roost. May I never have good roasting, if I have it not to-night, and roast thee, Charlie, afterwards ! ”

With this he calmly packed up my fish, and all the best of dear Annie’s eggs ; and went away chuckling

steadfastly, to his home, if one may call it so. But I was so thoroughly grieved and mortified by this most impudent robbery, that I started forth from my rocky screen with the intention of pursuing him, until my better sense arrested me, barely in time to escape his eyes. For I said to myself, that even supposing I could contend unarmed with him, it would be the greatest folly in the world to have my secret access known, and perhaps a fatal barrier placed between Lorna and myself, and I knew not what trouble brought upon her, all for the sake of a few eggs and fishes. It was better to bear this trifling loss, however ignominious and goading to the spirit, than to risk my love and Lorna's welfare, and perhaps be shot into the bargain. And I think that all will agree with me, that I acted for the wisest, in withdrawing to my shelter, though deprived of eggs and fishes.

Having waited (as I said) until there was no chance whatever of my love appearing, I hastened homeward very sadly ; and the wind of early autumn moaned across the moorland. All the beauty of the harvest, all the gaiety was gone, and the early fall of dusk was like a weight upon me. Nevertheless, I went every evening thenceforward for a fortnight ; hoping, every time in vain, to find my hope and comfort. And meanwhile, what perplexed me most was that the signals were replaced, in order as agreed upon, so that Lorna could scarcely be restrained by any rigour.

One time I had a narrow chance of being shot and settled with ; and it befell me thus. I was waiting

very carelessly, being now a little desperate, at the entrance to the glen, instead of watching through my sight-hole, as the proper practice was. Suddenly a ball went by me, with a whizz and whistle, passing through my hat and sweeping it away all folded up. My soft hat fluttered far down the stream, before I had time to go after it, and with the help of both wind and water, was fifty yards gone in a moment. At this I had just enough mind left to shrink back very suddenly, and lurk very still and closely; for I knew what a narrow escape it had been, as I heard the bullet, hard set by the powder, sing mournfully down the chasm, like a drone banished out of the hive. And as I peered through my little cranny, I saw a wreath of smoke still floating, where the thickness was of the withy-bed: and presently Carver Doone came forth, having stopped to reload his piece perhaps, and ran very swiftly to the entrance to see what he had shot.

Sore trouble had I to keep close quarters, from the slipperiness of the stone beneath me, with the water sliding over it. My foe came quite to the verge of the fall, where the river began to comb over; and there he stopped for a minute or two, on the utmost edge of dry land, upon the very spot indeed where I had fallen senseless when I clomb it in my boyhood. I could hear him breathing hard and grunting, as in doubt and discontent, for he stood within a yard of me, and I kept my right fist ready for him, if he should discover me. Then at the foot of the waterslide, my black hat suddenly appeared, tossing in white foam, and fluttering

like a raven wounded. Now I had doubted which hat to take, when I left home that day ; till I thought that the black became me best, and might seem kinder to Lorna.

“Have I killed thee, old bird, at last?” my enemy cried in triumph ; “’t is the third time I have shot at thee, and thou wast beginning to mock me. No more of thy cursed croaking now, to wake me in the morning. Ha, ha ! there are not many who get three chances from Carver Doone ; and none ever go beyond it.”

I laughed within myself at this, as he strode away in his triumph ; for was not this his third chance of me, and he no whit the wiser ? And then I thought that perhaps the chance might some day be on the other side.

For to tell the truth, I was heartily tired of lurking, and playing bo-peep so long ; to which nothing could have reconciled me, except my fear for Lorna. And here I saw was a man of strength fit for me to encounter, such as I had never met, but would be glad to meet with ; having found no man of late who needed not my mercy, at wrestling, or at single-stick. And growing more and more uneasy, as I found no Lorna, I would have tried to force the Doone Glen from the upper end, and take my chance of getting back, but for Annie and her prayers.

Now that same night I think it was, or at any rate the next one, that I noticed Betty Muxworthy going on most strangely. She made the queerest signs to

me, when nobody was looking, and laid her fingers on her lips, and pointed over her shoulder. But I took little heed of her, being in a kind of dudgeon, and oppressed with evil luck; believing too that all she wanted was to have some little grumble about some petty grievance.

But presently she poked me with the heel of a fire-bundle, and passing close to my ear whispered, so that none else could hear her, “Larna Doo-un.”

By these words I was so startled, that I turned round and stared at her; but she pretended not to know it, and began with all her might to scour an empty crock with a besom.

“Oh, Betty, let me help you! That work is much too hard for you,” I cried with a sudden chivalry, which only won rude answer.

“Zeed me adooing of thic, every naight last ten year, Jan, wiout vindin’ out how hard it wor. But if zo bee thee wants to help, carr peg’s bucket for me. Massy, if I ain’t forgotten to fade the pegs till now.”

Favouring me with another wink, to which I now paid the keenest heed, Betty went and fetched the lanthorn from the hook inside the door. Then when she had kindled it, not allowing me any time to ask what she was after, she went outside, and pointed to the great bock of wash, and riddlings, and brown hulkage (for we ground our own corn always), and though she knew that Bill Dadds and Jem Slocombe had full work to carry it on a pole (with another to help to sling it), she said to me as quietly as a maiden

might ask one to carry a glove, "Jan Ridd, carr thic thing for me."

So I carried it for her, without any words ; wondering what she was up to next, and whether she had ever heard of being too hard on the willing horse. And when we came to hog-pound, she turned upon me suddenly, with the lanthorn she was bearing, and saw that I had the bock by one hand very easily.

"Jan Ridd," she said, "there be no other man in England cud a' dood it. Now thee shalt have Larna."

While I was wondering how my chance of having Lorna could depend upon my power to carry pig's-wash, and how Betty could have any voice in the matter (which seemed to depend upon her decision), and in short, while I was all abroad as to her knowledge and everything ; the pigs who had been fast asleep and dreaming in their emptiness, awoke with one accord at the goodness of the smell around them. They had resigned themselves, as even pigs do, to a kind of fast, hoping to break their fast more sweetly on the morrow morning, But now they tumbled out all headlong, pigs below and pigs above, pigs point blank and pigs across, pigs courant, and pigs rampant, but all alike prepared to eat, and all in good cadence squeaking.

"Tak smarl boocket, and bale un out ; wad 'e waste sich stoof as thic here be ?" So Betty set me to feed the pigs, while she held the lanthorn ; and knowing what she was, I saw that she would not tell me another word until all the pigs were served. And in truth no man could well look at them, and delay to serve them,

they were all expressing appetite in so forcible a manner ; some running to and fro, and rubbing, and squealing as if from starvation, some rushing down to the oaken troughs, and poking each other away from them ; and the kindest of all putting up their fore-feet on the top rail of the hog-pound, and blinking their little eyes, and grunting prettily to coax us ; as who should say, “I trust you now ; you will be kind, I know, and give me the first and the very best of it.”

“Oppen ge-at now, wull ’e, Jan ? Maind, young sow wi’ the baible back arlway hath first toorn of it, ’cos I brought her up on my lap, I did. Zuck, zuck, zuck ! How her stickth her tail up ; do me good to zee un ! Now thiccy trough, thee zany, and tak thee girt legs out o’ the wai. Wish they wud gie thee a good baite, mak thee hop a bit vaster, I reckon. Hit that there girt ozebird over ’s back wi’ the broomstick, he be robbing of my young zow. Choog, choog, choog ! and a drap more left in the dipping-pail.”

“Come now, Betty,” I said when all the pigs were at it, sucking, swilling, munching, guzzling, thrusting, and ousting, and spilling the food upon the backs of their brethren (as great men do with their charity), “come now, Betty, how much longer am I to wait for your message ? Surely I am as good as a pig.”

“Dunno as thee be, Jan. No strakiness in thy bakkon, And now I come to think of it, Jan, thee zed, a wake agone last Vriday, as how I had got a girt be-ard. Wull ’e stick to that now, Maister Jan ?”

“No, no, Betty, certainly not ; I made a mistake

about it. I should have said a becoming mustachio, such as you may well be proud of."

"Then thee be a laiar, Jan Ridd. Zay so, laike a a man, lad."

"Not exactly that, Betty; but I made a great mistake: and I humbly ask your pardon; and if such a thing as a crown-piece, Betty"——

"No fai, no fai!" said Betty, however she put it into her pocket; "now, tak my advice, Jan; thee marry Zally Snowe."

"Not with all England for her dowry. Oh Betty, you know better."

"Ah's me! I know much worse, Jan. Break thy poor mother's heart it will. And to think of arl the dannger! Dost love Larna now so much?"

"With all the strength of my heart and soul. I will have her, or I will die, Betty."

"Wull. Thee will die in aither case. But it baint for me to argify. And do her love thee too, Jan?"

"I hope she does, Betty. I hope she does. What do you think about it?"

"Ah, then I may hold my tongue to it. Knaw what boys and maidens be, as well as I knaw young pegs. I myzell been o' that zort one taime every bit so well as you be." And Betty held the lanthorn up, and defied me to deny it; and the light through the horn showed a gleam in her eyes, such as I had never seen there before. "No odds, no odds about that," she continued; "mak a fool of myzell to speake of it. Arl gone into churchyard. But it be a lucky

foolery for thee, my boy, I can tull 'ee. For I love to see the love in thee. Coom'th over me as the spring do, though I be naigh three score. Now, Jan, I will tell thee one thing, can't abear to zee thee vretting so. Hould thee head down, same as they pegs do."

So I bent my head quite close to her ; and she whispered in my ear, "Goo of a marning, thee girt soft. Her can't get out of an avening now, her hath zent word to me, to tull 'ee."

In the glory of my delight at this, I bestowed upon Betty a chaste salute, with all the pigs for witnesses ; and she took it not amiss, considering how long she had been out of practice. But then she fell back, like a broom on its handle, and stared at me, feigning anger.

"Oh fai, oh fai ! Lunnon impudence, I doubt. I year thee hast gone on zadly, Jan."

CHAPTER V.

OF course I was up the very next morning before the October sunrise, and away through the wild and the woodland towards the Bagworthy water, at the foot of the long cascade. The rising of the sun was noble in the cold and warmth of it ; peeping down the spread of light, he raised his shoulder heavily over the edge of grey mountain, and wavering length of upland. Beneath his gaze the dew-fogs dipped, and crept to the hollow places ; then stole away in line and column, holding skirts, and clinging subtly at the sheltering corners, where rock hung over grass-land ; while the brave lines of the hills came forth, one beyond other gliding.

Then the woods arose in folds, like drapery of awakened mountains, stately with a depth of awe, and memory of the tempests. Autumn's mellow hand was on them, as they owned already, touched with gold, and red, and olive ; and their joy towards the sun was less to a bridegroom than a father.

Yet before the floating impress of the woods could

clear itself, suddenly the gladsome light leaped over hill and valley, casting amber, blue, and purple, and a tint of rich red rose, according to the scene they lit on, and the curtain flung around ; yet all alike dispelling fear and the cloven hoof of darkness, all on the wings of hope advancing, and proclaiming, “God is here.” Then life and joy sprang reassured from every crouching hollow ; every flower, and bud, and bird, had a fluttering sense of them ; and all the flashing of God’s gaze merged into soft beneficence.

So perhaps shall break upon us that eternal morning, when crag and chasm shall be no more, neither hill and valley, nor great unvintaged ocean ; when glory shall not scare happiness, neither happiness envy glory ; but all things shall arise and shine in the light of the Father’s countenance, because itself is risen. .

Who maketh his sun to rise upon both the just and the unjust. And surely but for the saving clause, Doone Glen had been in darkness. Now, as I stood with scanty breath—for few men could have won that climb—at the top of the long defile, and the bottom of the mountain gorge, all of myself, and the pain of it, and the cark of my discontent fell away into wonder and rapture. For I cannot help seeing things now and then, slow-witted as I have a right to be ; and perhaps because it comes so rarely, the sight dwells with me like a picture.

The bar of rock, with the water-cleft breaking steeply through it, stood bold and bare, and dark in shadow, grey with red gullies down it. But the sun

was beginning to glisten over the comb of the eastern highland, and through an archway of the wood hung with old nests and ivy. The lines of many a leaning tree were thrown, from the cliffs of the foreland, down upon the sparkling grass, at the foot of the western crags. And through the dewy meadow's breast, fringed with shade, but touched on one side with the sun-smile, ran the crystal water, curving in its brightness like diverted hope.

On either bank, the blades of grass, making their last autumn growth, pricked their spears and crisped their tuftings with the pearly purity. The tenderness of their green appeared under the glaucous mantle; while that grey suffusion, which is the blush of green life, spread its damask chastity. Even then my soul was lifted, worried though my mind was: who can see such large kind doings, and not be ashamed of human grief?

Not only unashamed of grief, but much abashed with joy, was I, when I saw my Lorna coming, purer than the morning dew, than the sun more bright and clear. That which made me love her so, that which lifted my heart to her, as the Spring wind lifts the clouds, was the gayness of her nature, and its inborn playfulness. And yet all this with maiden shame, a conscious dream of things unknown, and a sense of fate about them.

Down the valley still she came, not witting that I looked at her, having ceased (through my own misprision) to expect me yet awhile; or at least she told

herself so. In the joy of awakened life, and brightness of the morning, she had cast all care away, and seemed to float upon the sunrise, like a buoyant silver wave. Suddenly at sight of me, for I leaped forth at once, in fear of seeming to watch her unawares, the bloom upon her cheeks was deepened, and the radiance of her eyes ; and she came to meet me gladly.

“At last then, you are come, John. I thought you had forgotten me. I could not make you understand—they have kept me prisoner every evening : but come into my house : you are in danger here.”

Meanwhile I could not answer, being overcome with joy ; but followed to her little grotto, where I had been twice before. I knew that the crowning moment of my life was coming,—that Lorna would own her love for me.

She made for awhile as if she dreamed not of the meaning of my gaze, but tried to speak of other things, faltering now and then, and mantling with a richer damask below her long eyelashes.

“This is not what I came to know,” I whispered very softly ; “you know what I am come to ask.”

“If you are come on purpose to ask anything, why do you delay so ?” She turned away very bravely, but I saw that her lips were trembling.

“I delay so long, because I fear ; because my whole life hangs in balance on a single word ; because what I have near me now may never more be near me after, though more than all the world, or than a thousand worlds, to me.” As I spoke these words of passion in

a low soft voice, Lorna trembled more and more ; but she made no answer, neither yet looked up at me.

“I have loved you long and long ;” I pursued, being reckless now ; “when you were a little child, as a boy I worshipped you : then when I saw you a comely girl, as a stripling I adored you : now that you are a full-grown maiden, all the rest I do, and more,—I love you, more than tongue can tell, or heart can hold in silence. I have waited long and long ; and though I am so far below you, I can wait no longer ; but must have my answer.”

“You have been very faithful, John ;” she murmured to the fern and moss ; “I suppose I must reward you.”

“That will not do for me,” I said ; “I will not have reluctant liking, nor assent for pity’s sake ; which only means endurance. I must have all love, or none ; I must have your heart of hearts ; even as you have mine, Lorna.”

While I spoke, she glanced up shyly through her fluttering lashes, to prolong my doubt one moment, for her own delicious pride. Then she opened wide upon me all the glorious depth and softness of her loving eyes, and flung both arms around my neck, and answered with her heart on mine—

“Darling, you have won it all. I shall never be my own again. I am yours, my own one, for ever and for ever.”

I am sure I know not what I did, or what I said thereafter, being overcome with transport by her words and at her gaze. Only one thing I remember, when

she raised her bright lips to me, like a child, for me to kiss, such a smile of sweet temptation met me through her flowing hair, that I almost forgot my manners, giving her no time to breathe.

“That will do,” said Lorna gently, but violently blushing; “for the present that will do, John. And now remember one thing, dear. All the kindness is to be on my side; and you are to be very distant, as behoves to a young maiden; except when I invite you. But you may kiss my hand, John; oh yes, you may kiss my hand, you know. Ah to be sure! I had forgotten; how very stupid of me!”

For by this time I had taken one sweet hand and gazed on it, with the pride of all the world to think that such a lovely thing was mine; and then I slipped my little ring upon the wedding finger; and this time Lorna kept it, and looked with fondness on its beauty, and clung to me with a flood of tears.

“Every time you cry,” said I, drawing her closer to me; “I shall consider it an invitation not to be too distant. There now, none shall make you weep. Darling, you shall sigh no more; but live in peace and happiness, with me to guard and cherish you: and who shall dare to vex you?” But she drew a long sad sigh, and looked at the ground with the great tears rolling, and pressed one hand upon the trouble of her pure young breast.

“It can never, never, be;” she murmured to herself alone: “Who am I, to dream of it? Something in my heart tells me it can be so, never, never.”

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was, however, no possibility of depressing me at such a time. To be loved by Lorna, the sweet, the pure, the playful one, the fairest creature on God's earth and the most enchanting, the lady of high birth and mind—that I, a mere clumsy blundering yeoman, without wit, or wealth, or lineage, should have won that loving heart to be my own for ever, was a thought no fears could lessen, and no chance could steal from me.

Therefore at her own entreaty taking a very quick adieu, and by her own invitation, an exceeding kind one, I hurried home with deep exulting, yet some sad misgivings, for Lorna had made me promise now to tell my mother everything; as indeed I always meant to do, when my suit should be gone too far to stop. I knew of course that my dear mother would be greatly moved and vexed, the heirship of Glen Doone not being a very desirable dower; but in spite of that, and all disappointment as to little Ruth Huckaback, feeling my mother's tenderness and deep affection to me, and forgiving nature, I doubted not that before very long

she would view the matter as I did. Moreover I felt that if once I could get her only to look at Lorna, she would so love and glory in her, that I should obtain all praise and thanks, perchance without deserving them.

Unluckily for my designs, who should be sitting down at breakfast, with my mother and the rest, but Squire Faggus, as everybody now began to entitle him? I noticed something odd about him, something uncomfortable in his manner, and a lack of that ease and humour which had been wont to distinguish him. He took his breakfast as it came, without a single joke about it, or preference of this to that ; but with sly soft looks at Annie, who seemed unable to sit quiet, or to look at any one steadfastly. I feared in my heart what was coming on, and felt truly sorry for poor mother. After breakfast it became my duty to see to the ploughing of a barley-stubble ready for the sowing of French grass, and I asked Tom Faggus to come with me ; but he refused, and I knew the reason. Being resolved to allow him fair field to himself, though with great displeasure that a man of such illegal repute should marry into our family which had always been counted so honest, I carried my dinner upon my back, and spent the whole day with the furrows.

When I returned, Squire Faggus was gone ; which appeared to me but a sorry sign, inasmuch as if mother had taken kindly to him and to his intentions, she would surely have made him remain awhile to celebrate the occasion. And presently no doubt was left : for

Lizzie came running to meet me, at the bottom of the woodrick, and cried,—

“ Oh John, there is such a business. Mother is in such a state of mind, and Annie crying her eyes out. What do you think? You never would guess, though I have suspected it, ever so long.”

“ No need for me to guess,” I replied, as though with some indifference, because of her self-important air; “ I knew all about it long ago. You have not been crying much I see. I should like you better if you had.”

“ Why should I cry? I like Tom Faggus. He is the only one I ever see with the spirit of a man.”

This was a cut, of course, at me. Mr. Faggus had won the good will of Lizzie by his hatred of the Doones, and vows that if he could get a dozen men of any courage to join him, he would pull their stronghold about their ears without any more ado. This malice of his seemed strange to me, as he had never suffered at their hands, so far at least as I knew; was it to be attributed to his jealousy of outlaws who excelled him in his business? Not being good at repartee, I made no answer to Lizzie, having found this course more irksome to her than the very best invective: and so we entered the house together; and mother sent at once for me, while I was trying to console my darling sister Annie.

“ Oh, John! speak one good word for me;” she cried, with both hands laid in mine, and her tearful eyes looking up at me.

“ Not one, my pet, but a hundred ;” I answered, kindly embracing her : “ have no fear, little sister : I am going to make your case so bright, by comparison I mean, that mother will send for you in five minutes, and call you her best, her most dutiful child, and praise Cousin Tom to the skies, and send a man on horseback after him : and then you will have a harder task to intercede for me, my dear.”

“ Oh John, dear John, you won’t tell her about Lorna—oh not to-day, dear.”

“ Yes, to-day, and at once, Annie. I want to have it over, and be done with it.”

“ Oh, but think of her, dear. I am sure she could not bear it, after this great shock already.”

“ She will bear it all the better,” said I ; “ the one will drive the other out. I know exactly what mother is. She will be desperately savage first with you, and then with me, and then for a very little while with both of us together ; and then she will put one against the other (in her mind I mean) and consider which was most to blame ; and in doing that she will be compelled to find the best in either’s case, that it may beat the other ; and so as the pleas come before her mind, they will gain upon the charges, both of us being her children, you know : and before very long (particularly if we both keep out of the way) she will begin to think that after all she has been a little too hasty ; and then she will remember how good we have always been to her ; and how like our father. Upon that, she will think of her own love-time, and sigh a good bit, and

cry a little, and then smile, and send for both of us, and beg our pardon, and call us her two darlings."

"Now, John, how on earth can you know all that?" exclaimed my sister wiping her eyes, and gazing at me with a soft bright smile. "Who on earth can have told you, John? People to call you stupid indeed! Why, I feel that all you say is quite true, because you describe so exactly what I should do myself; I mean—I mean if I had two children, who had behaved as we have done. But tell me, darling John, how you learned all this."

"Never you mind," I replied, with a nod of some conceit, I fear: "I must be a fool if I did not know what mother is by this time."

Now, inasmuch as the thing befell according to my prediction; what need for me to dwell upon it, after saying how it would be? Moreover I would regret to write down what mother said about Lorna, in her first surprise and tribulation; not only because I was grieved by the gross injustice of it, and frightened mother with her own words (repeated deeply after her); but rather because it is not well, when people repent of hasty speech, to enter it against them.

That is said to be the angels' business; and I doubt if they can attend to it much, without doing injury to themselves.

However, by the afternoon, when the sun began to go down upon us; our mother sate on the garden bench, with her head on my great otter-skin waistcoat (which was waterproof), and her right arm round our Annie's

waist, and scarcely knowing which of us she ought to make the most of, or which deserved most pity. Not that she had forgiven yet the rivals to her love—Tom Faggus I mean, and Lorna—but that she was beginning to think a little better of them now, and a vast deal better of her own children.

And it helped her much in this regard, that she was not thinking half so well as usual of herself, or rather of her own judgment; for in good truth she had no self, only as it came home to her, by no very distant road, but by way of her children. A better mother never lived; and can I, after searching all things, add another word to that?

And indeed poor Lizzie was not so very bad; but behaved (on the whole) very well for her. She was much to be pitied, poor thing, and great allowances made for her, as belonging to a well-grown family, and a very comely one; and feeling her own shortcomings. This made her leap to the other extreme, and reassert herself too much, endeavouring to exalt the mind at the expense of the body; because she had the invisible one (so far as can be decided) in better share than the visible. Not but what she had her points, and very comely points of body; lovely eyes to wit, and very beautiful hands and feet (almost as good as Lorna's), and a neck as white as snow; but Lizzie was not gifted with our gait and port, and bounding health.

Now, while we sate on the garden bench, under the great ash-tree, we left dear mother to take her own way, and talk at her own pleasure. Children almost

always are more wide-awake than their parents. The fathers and the mothers laugh; but the young ones have the best of them. And now both Annie knew, and I, that we had gotten the best of mother; and therefore we let her lay down the law, as if we had been two dollies.

“Darling John,” my mother said; “your case is a very hard one. A young and very romantic girl—God send that I be right in my charitable view of her—has met an equally simple boy, among great dangers and difficulties, from which my son has saved her, at the risk of his life at every step. Of course, she became attached to him, and looked up to him in every way, as a superior being”—

“Come now, mother,” I said; “if you only saw Lorna, you would look upon me as the lowest dirt”—

“No doubt I should,” my mother answered; “and the king, and queen, and all the royal family. Well, this poor angel, having made up her mind to take compassion upon my son, when he had saved her life so many times, persuades him to marry her out of pure pity, and throw his poor mother overboard. And the saddest part of it all is this”—

“That my mother will never, never, never understand the truth,” said I.

“That is all I wish,” she answered; “just to get at the simple truth from my own perception of it. John, you are very wise in kissing me; but perhaps you would not be so wise in bringing Lorna for an afternoon, just to see what she thinks of me. There is a

good saddle of mutton now ; and there are some very good sausages left, on the blue dish with the anchor, Annie, from the last little sow we killed."

"As if Lorna would eat sausages!" said I, with appearance of high contempt, though rejoicing all the while that mother seemed to have her name so pat ; and she pronounced it in a manner which made my heart leap to my ears: "Lorna to eat sausages!"

"I don't see why she shouldn't," my mother answered smiling ; "if she means to be a farmer's wife, she must take to farmer's ways, I think. What do you say, Annie ?"

"She will eat whatever John desires, I should hope," said Annie gravely ; "particularly as I made them."

"Oh that I could only get the chance of trying her!" I answered ; "if you could once behold her, mother, you would never let her go again. And she would love you with all her heart, she is so good and gentle."

"That is a lucky thing for me ;" saying this my mother wept, as she had been doing off and on, when no one seemed to look at her ; "otherwise I suppose, John, she would very soon turn me out of the farm, having you so completely under her thumb, as she seems to have. I see now that my time is over. Lizzie and I will seek our fortunes. It is wiser so."

"Now, mother," I cried ; "will you have the kindness not to talk any nonsense ? Everything belongs to you ; and so, I hope, your children do. And you, in

turn, belong to us ; as you have proved ever since,—oh ever since we can remember. Why do you make Annie cry so ? You ought to know better than that."

Mother upon this went over all the things she had done before ; how many times I know not ; neither does it matter. Only she seemed to enjoy it more, every time of doing it. And then she said she was an old fool ; and Annie (like a thorough girl) pulled her one grey hair out.

CHAPTER VII.

ALTHOUGH by our mother's reluctant consent a large part of the obstacles between Annie and her lover appeared to be removed, on the other hand Lorna and myself gained little ; except as regarded comfort of mind, and some ease to the conscience. Moreover, our chance of frequent meetings and delightful converse was much impaired, at least for the present ; because though mother was not aware of my narrow escape from Carver Doone, she made me promise never to risk my life by needless visits. And upon this point, that is to say, the necessity of the visit, she was well content, as she said, to leave me to my own good sense and honour ; only begging me always to tell her of my intention beforehand. This pledge, however, for her own sake, I declined to give ; knowing how wretched she would be during all the time of my absence ; and on that account, I promised instead, that I would always give her a full account of my adventure upon returning.

Now my mother, as might be expected, began at

once to cast about for some means of relieving me from all further peril, and herself from great anxiety. She was full of plans for fetching Lorna, in some wonderful manner, out of the power of the Doones entirely, and into her own hands, where she was to remain for at least a twelvemonth, learning all mother and Annie could teach her of dairy business, and farm-house life, and the best mode of packing butter. And all this arose from my happening to say, without meaning anything, how the poor dear had longed for quiet, and a life of simplicity, and a rest away from violence ! Bless thee, mother—now long in heaven, there is no need to bless thee ; but it often makes a dimness now in my well-worn eyes, when I think of thy loving-kindness, warmth, and romantic innocence.

As to stealing my beloved from that vile Glen Doone, the deed itself was not impossible, nor beyond my daring ; but in the first place would she come, leaving her old grandfather to die without her tendance ? And even if, through fear of Carver and that wicked Counsellor, she should consent to fly ; would it be possible to keep her without a regiment of soldiers ? Would not the Doones at once ride forth to scour the country for their queen, and finding her (as they must do) burn our house, and murder us, and carry her back triumphantly ?

All this I laid before my mother, and to such effect, that she acknowledged, with a sigh, that nothing else remained for me (in the present state of matters) except to keep a careful watch upon Lorna from safe

distance, observe the policy of the Doones, and wait for a tide in their affairs. Meanwhile I might even fall in love (as mother unwisely hinted) with a certain more peaceful heiress, although of inferior blood, who would be daily at my elbow. I am not sure but what dear mother herself would have been disappointed, had I proved myself so fickle ; and my disdain and indignation at the mere suggestion did not so much displease her ; for she only smiled and answered :—

“ Well, it is not for me to say ; God knows what is good for us. Likings will not come to order ; otherwise I should not be where I am this day. And of one thing I am rather glad : Uncle Reuben well deserves that his pet scheme should miscarry. He who called my boy a coward, an ignoble coward, because he would not join some crack-brained plan against the valley, which sheltered his beloved one ! And all the time this dreadful ‘ coward ’ risking his life daily there, without a word to any one ! How glad I am that you will not have, for all her miserable money, that little dwarfish grand-daughter of the insolent old miser ! ”

She turned, and by her side was standing poor Ruth Huckaback herself, white, and sad, and looking steadily at my mother’s face, which became as red as a plum, while her breath deserted her.

“ If you please, madam,” said the little maiden, with her large calm eyes unwavering ; “ it is not my fault, but God Almighty’s, that I am a little dwarfish creature. I knew not that you regarded me with so much contempt on that account ; neither have you told

my grandfather, at least within my hearing, that he was an insolent old miser. When I return to Dulverton, which I trust to do to-morrow (for it is too late to-day), I shall be careful not to tell him your opinion of him, lest I should thwart any schemes you may have upon his property. I thank you all for your kindness to me, which has been very great; far more than a little dwarfish creature could, for her own sake, expect. I will only add for your further guidance, one more little truth. It is by no means certain that my grandfather will settle any of his miserable money upon me. If I offend him, as I would in a moment, for the sake of a brave and straight-forward man"—here she gave me a glance which I scarcely knew what to do with—"my grandfather, upright as he is, would leave me without a shilling. And I often wish it were so. So many miseries come upon me from the miserable money"—Here she broke down, and burst out crying, and ran away with a faint good-bye; while we three looked at one another; and felt that we had the worst of it.

"Impudent little dwarf!" said my mother, recovering her breath after ever so long. "Oh John, how thankful you ought to be! What a life she would have led you!"

"Well, I am sure!" said Annie, throwing her arms around poor mother: "who could have thought that little atom had such an outrageous spirit! For my part, I cannot think how she can have been sly enough to hide it in that crafty manner, that John might think her an angel!"

“Well, for my part,” I answered, laughing; “I never admired Ruth Huckabuck half, or a quarter so much, before. She is rare stuff. I would have been glad to have married her to-morrow, if I had never seen my Lorna.”

“And a nice nobody I should have been, in my own house!” cried mother: “I never can be thankful enough to darling Lorna for saving me. Did you see how her eyes flashed?”

“That I did; and very fine they were. Now nine maidens out of ten would have feigned not to have heard one word that was said, and have borne black malice in their hearts. Come, Annie, now, would not you have done so?”

“I think,” said Annie; “although of course I cannot tell, you know, John, that I should have been ashamed at hearing what was never meant for me, and should have been almost as angry with myself as anybody.”

“So you would,” replied my mother: “so any daughter of mine would have done, instead of railing and reviling. However, I am very sorry that any words of mine which the poor little thing chose to overhear should have made her so forget herself. I shall beg her pardon before she goes; and I shall expect her to beg mine.”

“That she will never do,” said I; “a more resolute little maiden never yet had right upon her side; although it was a mere accident. I might have said the same thing myself; and she was hard upon you, mother dear.”

After this, we said no more, at least about that matter; and little Ruth, the next morning, left us, in spite of all that we could do. She vowed an everlasting friendship to my younger sister Eliza; but she looked at Annie with some resentment, when they said good-bye, for being so much taller. At any rate so Annie fancied, but she may have been quite wrong. I rode beside the little maid till far beyond Exeford, when all danger of the moor was past, and then I left her with John Fry, not wishing to be too particular, after all the talk about her money. She had tears in her eyes when she bade me farewell, and she sent a kind message home to mother, and promised to come again at Christmas, if she could win permission.

Upon the whole, my opinion was that she had behaved uncommonly well, for a maid whose self-love was outraged; with spirit, I mean, and proper pride; and yet with a great endeavour to forgive; which is, meseems, the hardest of all things to a woman, outside of her own family.

After this, for another month, nothing worthy of notice happened, except of course that I found it needful, according to the strictest good sense and honour, to visit Lorna immediately after my discourse with mother, and to tell her all about it. My beauty gave me one sweet kiss with all her heart (as she always did, when she kissed at all) and I begged for one more to take to our mother, and before leaving, I obtained it. It is not for me to tell all she said, even supposing (what is not likely) that any one cared to know it, being

more and more peculiar to ourselves and no one else. But one thing that she said was this, and I took good care to carry it, word for word, to my mother and Annie.

“I never can believe, dear John, that after all the crime and outrage wrought by my reckless family, it ever can be meant for me to settle down to peace and comfort in a simple household. With all my heart I long for home; any home, however dull and wearisome to those used to it, would seem a paradise to me, if only free from brawl and tumult; and such as I could call my own. But even if God would allow me this, in lieu of my wild inheritance; it is quite certain that the Doones never can and never will.”

Again, when I told her how my mother and Annie, as well as myself, longed to have her at Plover’s Barrows, and teach her all the quiet duties in which she was sure to take such delight, she only answered with a bright blush; that while her grandfather was living she would never leave him; and that even if she were free, certain ruin was all she should bring to any house that received her, at least within the utmost reach of her amiable family. This was too plain to be denied; and seeing my dejection at it, she told me bravely that we must hope for better times, if possible, and asked how long I would wait for her.

“Not a day if I had my will,” I answered very warmly; at which she turned away confused, and would not look at me for awhile; “but all my life,” I went on to say, “if my fortune is so ill. And how long would you wait for me, Lorna?”

“Till I could get you,” she answered slyly, with a smile which was brighter to me than the brightest wit could be. “And now,” she continued, “you bound me, John, with a very beautiful ring to you, and when I dare not wear it, I carry it always on my heart. But I will bind you to me, you dearest, with the very poorest and plainest thing that ever you set eyes on. I could give you fifty fairer ones, but they would not be honest; and I love you for your honesty, and nothing else of course, John; so don’t you be conceited. Look at it, what a queer old thing! There are some ancient marks upon it, very grotesque and wonderful; it looks like a cat in a tree almost; but never mind what it looks like. This old ring must have been a giant’s; therefore it will fit you perhaps, you enormous John. It has been on the front of my old glass necklace (which my grandfather found them taking away, and very soon made them give back again) ever since I can remember; and long before that, as some woman told me. Now, you seem very greatly amazed; pray what thinks my lord of it?”

“That it is worth fifty of the pearl thing, which I gave you, you darling; and that I will not take it from you.”

“Then you will never take me, that is all. I will have nothing to do with a gentleman”—

“No gentleman, dear,—a yeoman.”

“Very well, a yeoman—nothing to do with a yeoman who will not accept my love-gage. So, if you please, give it back again, and take your lovely ring back.”

She looked at me in such a manner, half in earnest,

half in jest, and three times three in love, that in spite of all good resolutions, and her own faint protest, I was forced to abandon all firm ideas, and kiss her till she was quite ashamed, and her head hung on my bosom, with the night of her hair shed over me. Then I placed the pearl-ring back on the soft elastic bend of the finger she held up to scold me ; and on my own smallest finger drew the heavy hoop she had given me. I considered this with satisfaction, until my darling recovered herself ; and then I began very gravely about it, to keep her (if I could) from chiding me.

“Mistress Lorna, this is not the ring of any giant. It is nothing more nor less than a very ancient thumb-ring, such as once in my father’s time was ploughed up out of the ground in our farm, and sent to learned doctors, who told us all about it, but kept the ring for their trouble. I will accept it, my own one love ; and it shall go to my grave with me.” And so it shall, unless there be villains who would dare to rob the dead.

Now I have spoken about this ring (though I scarcely meant to do so, and would rather keep to myself things so very holy) because it holds an important part in the history of my Lorna. I asked her where the glass necklace was from which the ring was fastened, and which she had worn in her childhood, and she answered that she hardly knew, but remembered that her grandfather had begged her to give it up to him, when she was ten years old or so, and had promised to keep it for her, until she could take care of it ; at the same time giving her back the ring, and fastening it from her

pretty neck, and telling her to be proud of it. And so she always had been, and now from her sweet breast she took it, and it became John Ridd's delight.

All this, or at least great part of it, I told my mother truly, according to my promise; and she was greatly pleased with Lorna for having been so good to me, and for speaking so very sensibly; and then she looked at the great gold ring, but could by no means interpret it. Only she was quite certain, as indeed I myself was, that it must have belonged to an ancient race of great consideration, and high rank, in their time. Upon which, I was for taking it off, lest it should be degraded by a common farmer's finger. But mother said "No," with tears in her eyes; "if the common farmer had won the great lady of the ancient race, what were rings and old world trinkets, when compared to the living jewel?" Being quite of her opinion in this, and loving the ring (which had no gem in it) as the token of my priceless gem, I resolved to wear it at any cost, except when I should be ploughing, or doing things likely to break it; although I must own that it felt very queer (for I never had throttled a finger before), and it looked very queer, for a length of time, upon my great hard-working hand.

And before I got used to my ring, or people could think that it belonged to me (plain and ungarnished though it was), and before I went to see Lorna again, having failed to find any necessity, and remembering my duty to mother, we all had something else to think of, not so pleasant and more puzzling.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now November was upon us, and we had kept All-hallowmass, with roasting of skewered apples (like so many shuttlecocks), and after that the day of Fawkes, as became good Protestants, with merry bonfires and burned batatas, and plenty of good feeding in honour of our religion ; and then while we were at wheat-sowing, another visitor arrived.

This was Master Jeremy Stickles, who had been a good friend to me (as described before) in London, and had earned my mother's gratitude, so far as ever he chose to have it. And he seemed inclined to have it all ; for he made our farmhouse his head-quarters, and kept us quite at his beck and call, going out at any time of the evening, and coming back at any time of the morning, and always expecting us to be ready, whether with horse, or man, or maiden, or fire, or provisions. We knew that he was employed somehow upon the service of the King, and had at different stations certain troopers and orderlies, quite at his disposal : also we knew that he never went out, nor even

slept in his bedroom, without heavy firearms well loaded, and a sharp sword nigh his hand ; and that he held a great commission, under royal signet, requiring all good subjects, all officers of whatever degree, and especially justices of the peace, to aid him to the utmost, with person, beast, and chattel, or to answer it at their peril.

Now Master Jeremy Stickles, of course, knowing well what women are, durst not open to any of them the nature of his instructions. But, after awhile, perceiving that I could be relied upon, and that it was a great discomfort not to have me with him, he took me aside in a lonely place, and told me nearly everything ; having bound me first by oath, not to impart to any one, without his own permission, until all was over.

But at this present time of writing, all is over long ago ; ay and forgotten too, I ween, except by those who suffered. Therefore may I tell the whole without any breach of confidence. Master Stickles was going forth upon his usual night-journey, when he met me coming home, and I said something half in jest, about his zeal and secresy ; upon which he looked all round the yard, and led me to an open space in the clover-field adjoining.

“John,” he said, “you have some right to know the meaning of all this, being trusted as you were by the Lord Chief Justice. But he found you scarcely supple enough, neither gifted with due brains.”

“Thank God for that same,” I answered, while he tapped his head, to signify his own much larger allowance. Then he made me bind myself, which in an evil hour I did, to retain his secret; and after that he went on solemnly, and with much importance.

“There be some people fit to plot, and others to be plotted against, and others to unravel plots, which is the highest gift of all. This last hath fallen to my share, and a very thankless gift it is, although a rare and choice one. Much of peril too attends it; daring courage, and great coolness, are as needful for the work, as ready wit, and spotless honour. Therefore His Majesty’s advisers have chosen me for this high task, and they could not have chosen a better man. Although you have been in London, Jack, much longer than you wished it; you are wholly ignorant, of course, in matters of state, and the public weal.”

“Well,” said I, “no doubt but I am; and all the better for me. Although I heard a deal of them; for everybody was talking, and ready to come to blows; if only it could be done without danger. But one said this, and one said that; and they talked so much about Birminghams, and Tantivies, and Whigs and Tories, and Protestant flails, and such like, that I was only too glad to have my glass, and clink my spoon for answer.

“Right, John, thou art right as usual. Let the King go his own gait. He hath too many mistresses,

to be ever England's master. Nobody need fear him, for he is not like his father: he will have his own way, 'tis true, but without stopping other folk of theirs: and well he knows what women are, for he never asks them questions. Now, heard you much in London town about the Duke of Monmouth?"

"Not so very much," I answered; "not half so much as in Devonshire: only that he was a hearty man, and a very handsome one, and now was banished by the Tories; and most people wished he was coming back, instead of the Duke of York, who was trying boots in Scotland."

"Things are changed since you were in town. The Whigs are getting up again, through the folly of the Tories in killing poor Lord Russell; and now this Master Sidney (if my Lord condemns him) will make it worse again. There is much disaffection everywhere, and it must grow to an outbreak. The King hath many troops in London, and meaneth to bring more from Tangier; but he cannot command these country-places; and the trained bands cannot help him much, even if they would. Now, do you understand me, John?"

"In truth, not I. I see not what Tangier hath to do with Exmoor; nor the Duke of Monmouth with Jeremy Stickles."

"Thou great clod, put it the other way. Jeremy Stickles may have much to do about the Duke of Monmouth. The Whigs having failed of Exclusion, and having been punished bitterly for the blood they

shed, are ripe for any violence. And the turn of the balance is now to them. See-saw is the fashion of England always ; and the Whigs will soon be the top-sawyers."

"But," said I, still more confused ; "'The King is the top-sawyer,' according to our proverb. How then can the Whigs be ?"

"Thou art a hopeless ass, John. Better to sew with a chestnut than to teach thee the constitution. Let it be so ; let it be. I have seen a boy of five years old more apt at politics than thou. Nay, look not offended, lad. It is my fault for being over-deep to thee. I should have considered thy intellect."

"Nay, Master Jeremy ; make no apologies. It is I that should excuse myself : but, God knows, I have no politics."

"Stick to that, my lad," he answered ; "so shalt thou die easier. Now, in ten words (without parties, or trying thy poor brain too much), I am here to watch the gathering of a secret plot, not so much against the King as against the due succession."

"Now I understand at last. But, Master Stickles, you might have said all that an hour ago almost."

"It would have been better, if I had, to thee," he replied, with much compassion ; "thy hat is nearly off thy head with the swelling of brain I have given thee. Blows, blows, are thy business, Jack. There thou art in thine element. And, haply, this business will bring thee plenty, even for thy great head to take. Now hearken to one who wishes thee well, and plainly sees

the end of it,—stick thou to the winning side, and have nought to do with the other one.”

“That,” said I, in great haste and hurry, “is the very thing I want to do, if I only knew which was the winning side, for the sake of Lorna—that is to say, for the sake of my dear mother and sisters, and the farm.”

“Ha!” cried Jeremy Stickles, laughing at the redness of my face—“Lorna, saidst thou; now what Lorna? Is it the name of a maiden, or a light-o'-love?”

“Keep to your own business,” I answered, very proudly; “spy as much as e'er thou wilt, and use our house for doing it, without asking leave or telling; but if I ever find thee spying into my affairs, all the King's lifeguards in London, and the dragoons thou bringest hither, shall not save thee from my hand—or one finger is enough for thee.”

Being carried beyond myself by his insolence about Lorna, I looked at Master Stickles so, and spake in such a voice, that all his daring courage and his spotless honour quailed within him, and he shrank—as if I would strike so small a man.

Then I left him, and went to work at the sacks upon the corn-floor, to take my evil spirit from me before I should see mother. For (to tell the truth) now my strength was full, and troubles were gathering round me, and people took advantage so much of my easy temper; sometimes, when I was over-tried, a sudden heat ran over me, and a glowing of all my muscles, and a tingling for a mighty throw, such as my utmost self-

command, and fear of hurting any one, could but ill refrain. Afterwards I was always very sadly ashamed of myself, knowing how poor a thing bodily strength is, as compared with power of mind, and that it is a coward's part to misuse it upon weaker folk. For the present, there was a little breach between Master Stickles and me, for which I blamed myself very sorely. But though, in full memory of his kindness and faithfulness in London, I asked his pardon many times for my foolish anger with him, and offered to undergo any penalty he would lay upon me, he only said it was no matter, there was nothing to forgive. When people say that, the truth often is, that they can forgive nothing.

So for the present a breach was made between Master Jeremy and myself, which to me seemed no great loss, inasmuch as it relieved me from any privity to his dealings, for which I had small liking. All I feared was lest I might, in any way, be ungrateful to him ; but when he would have no more of me, what could I do to help it ? However, in a few days' time, I was of good service to him, as you shall see in its proper place.

But now my own affairs were thrown into such disorder, that I could think of nothing else, and had the greatest difficulty in hiding my uneasiness. For suddenly, without any warning, or a word of message, all my Lorna's signals ceased, which I had been accustomed to watch for daily, and as it were to feed upon them, with a glowing heart. The first time I

stood on the wooded crest, and found no change from yesterday, I could hardly believe my eyes, or thought at least that it must be some great mistake on the part of my love. However, even that oppressed me with a heavy heart, which grew heavier, as I found from day to day no token.

Three times I went and waited long at the bottom of the valley, where now the stream was brown and angry with the rains of autumn, and the weeping trees hung leafless. But though I waited at every hour of day, and far into the night, no light footstep came to meet me, no sweet voice was in the air; all was lonely, drear, and drenched with sodden desolation. It seemed as if my love was dead, and the winds were at her funeral.

Once I sought far up the valley, where I had never been before, even beyond the copse where Lorna had found and lost her brave young cousin. Following up the river channel, in shelter of the evening fog, I gained a corner within stone's throw of the last out-lying cot. This was a gloomy, low, square house, without any light in the windows, roughly built of wood and stone, as I saw when I drew nearer. For knowing it to be Carver's dwelling (or at least suspecting so, from some words of Lorna's), I was led by curiosity, and perhaps by jealousy, to have a closer look at it. Therefore, I crept up the stream, losing half my sense of fear, by reason of anxiety. And in truth there was not much to fear, the sky being now too dark for even a shooter of wild fowl to make good.

aim. And nothing else but guns could hurt me; as in the pride of my strength I thought, and in my skill of single-stick.

Nevertheless, I went warily, being now almost among this nest of cockatrices. The back of Carver's house abutted on the waves of the rushing stream; and seeing a loop-hole, vacant for muskets, I looked in, but all was quiet. So far as I could judge by listening, there was no one now inside, and my heart for a moment leaped with joy, for I had feared to find Lorna there. Then I took a careful survey of the dwelling, and its windows, and its door, and aspect, as if I had been a robber meaning to make privy entrance. It was well for me that I did this, as you will find hereafter.

Having impressed upon my mind (a slow but, perhaps, retentive mind) all the bearings of the place, and all its opportunities, and even the curve of the stream along it, and the bushes near the door, I was much inclined to go further up, and understand all the village. But a bar of red light across the river, some forty yards on above me, and crossing from the opposite side, like a chain prevented me. In that second house there was a gathering of loud and merry outlaws, making as much noise as if they had the law upon their side. Some indeed, as I approached, were laying down both right and wrong, as purely, and with as high a sense, as if they knew the difference. Cold and troubled as I was, I could hardly keep from laughing.

Before I betook myself home that night, and eased dear mother's heart so much, and made her pale face spread with smiles, I had resolved to penetrate Glen Doone from the upper end, and learn all about my Lorna. Not but what I might have entered from my unsuspected channel, as so often I had done ; but that I saw fearful need for knowing something more than that. Here was every sort of trouble gathering upon me ; here was Jeremy Stickles stealing upon every one in the dark ; here was Uncle Reuben plotting Satan only could tell what ; here was a white night-capped man coming bodily from the grave ; here was my own sister Annie committed to a highwayman, and mother in distraction ; most of all,—here, there, and where,—was my Lorna stolen, dungeoned, perhaps outraged ? It was no time for shilly shally, for the balance of this and that, or for a man with blood and muscle to pat his nose and ponder. If I left my Lorna so ; if I let those black-soul'd villains work their pleasure on my love ; if the heart that clave to mine could find no vigour in it—then let maidens cease from men, and rest their faith in tabby-cats.

Rudely rolling these ideas in my heavy head and brain, I resolved to let the morrow put them into form and order, but not contradict them. And then, as my constitution willed (being like that of England), I slept, and there was no stopping me.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT the enterprise now resolved upon was far more dangerous than any hitherto attempted by me, needs no further proof than this:—I went and made my will at Porlock, with a middling honest lawyer there; not that I had much to leave, but that none could say how far the farm, and all the farming stock, might depend on my disposition. It makes me smile when I remember how particular I was, and how for the life of me I was puzzled to bequeath most part of my clothes, and hats, and things altogether my own, to Lorna, without the shrewd old lawyer knowing who she was and where she lived. At last, indeed, I flattered myself that I had baffled old Tape's curiosity; but his wrinkled smile and his speech at parting made me again uneasy.

“A very excellent will, young sir. An admirably just and virtuous will; all your effects to your nearest of kin; filial and fraternal duty thoroughly exemplified; nothing diverted to alien channels, except a small token of esteem and reverence, to an elderly lady, I presume: and which may or may not be valid, or

invalid, on the ground of uncertainty, or the absence of any legal status on the part of the legatee. Ha, ha ! Yes, yes ! Few young men are so free from exceptionable entanglements. Two guineas is my charge, sir : and a rare good will for the money. Very prudent of you, sir. Does you credit in every way. Well, well : we all must die ; and often the young before the old."

Not only did I think two guineas a great deal too much money for a quarter of an hour's employment, but also I disliked particularly the words with which he concluded ; they sounded, from his grating voice, like the evil omen of a croaking raven. Nevertheless I still abode in my fixed resolve to go, and find out, if I died for it, what was become of Lorna. And herein I lay no claim to courage ; the matter being simply a choice between two evils ; of which by far the greater one was, of course, to lose my darling.

The journey was a great deal longer, to fetch around the Southern hills, and enter by the Doone-gate, than to cross the lower land and steal in by the water-slide. However, I durst not take a horse (for fear of the Doones, who might be abroad upon their usual business), but started betimes in the evening, so as not to hurry, or waste any strength upon the way. And thus I came to the robber's highway, walking circumspectly, scanning the sky-line of every hill, and searching the folds of every valley, for any moving figure.

Although it was now well on towards dark, and the

sun was down an hour or so, I could see the robbers' road before me, in a trough of the winding hills, where the brook ploughed down from the higher barrows, and the coving banks were roofed with furze. At present, there was no one passing, neither post nor sentinel, so far as I could descry; but I thought it safer to wait a little, as twilight melted into night; and then I crept down a seam of the highland, and stood upon the *Doone-track*.

As the road approached the entrance, it became more straight and strong, like a channel cut from rock, with the water brawling darkly along the naked side of it. Not a tree or bush was left, to shelter a man from bullets; all was stern, and stiff, and rugged, as I could not help perceiving, even through the darkness; and a smell as of churchyard mould, a sense of being boxed in and cooped, made me long to be out again.

And here I was, or seemed to be, particularly unlucky; for as I drew near the very entrance, lightly of foot, and warily, the moon (which had often been my friend) like an enemy, broke upon me, topping the eastward ridge of rock, and filling all the open spaces with the play of wavering light. I shrank back into the shadowy quarter, on the right side of the road; and gloomily employed myself to watch the triple entrance, on which the moonlight fell askew.

All across and before the three rude and beetling archways, hung a felled oak overhead, black, and thick, and threatening. This, as I heard before,

could be let fall in a moment, so as to crush a score of men, and bar the approach of horses. Behind this tree, the rocky mouth was spanned, as by a gallery, with brushwood and piled timber, all upon a ledge of stone, where thirty men might lurk unseen, and fire at any invader. From that rampart it would be impossible to dislodge them, because the rock fell sheer below them twenty feet, or it may be more; while overhead it towered three hundred, and so jutted over that nothing could be cast upon them; even if a man could climb the height. And the access to this portcullis place—if I may so call it, being no portcullis there—was through certain rocky chambers known to the tenants only.

But the cleverest of their devices, and the most puzzling to an enemy, was that, instead of one mouth only, there were three to choose from, with nothing to betoken which was the proper access; all being pretty much alike, and all unfenced, and yawning. And the common rumour was that in times of any danger, when any force was known to be on muster in their neighbourhood, they changed their entrance every day, and diverted the other two, by means of sliding doors to the chasms and dark abysses.

Now I could see those three rough arches, jagged, black, and terrible; and I knew that only one of them could lead me to the valley; neither gave the river now any further guidance; but dived underground with a sullen roar, where it met the cross-bar of the mountain. Having no means at all of judging which

was the right way of the three, and knowing that the other two would lead to almost certain death, in the ruggedness and darkness,—for how could a man, among precipices and bottomless depths of water, without a ray of light, have any chance to save his life?—I do declare that I was half inclined to go away, and have done with it.

However, I knew one thing for certain, to wit that the longer I stayed debating, the more would the enterprise pall upon me, and the less my relish be. And it struck me that, in times of peace, the middle way was the likeliest; and the others diverging right and left in their further parts might be made to slide into it (not far from the entrance), at the pleasure of the warders. Also I took it for good omen that I remembered (as rarely happened) a very fine line in the Latin grammar, whose emphasis and meaning is “middle road is safest.”

Therefore, without more hesitation, I plunged into the middle way, holding a long ash staff before me, shodden at the end with iron. Presently I was in black darkness, groping along the wall, and feeling a deal more fear than I wished to feel; especially when upon looking back I could no longer see the light, which I had forsaken. Then I stumbled over something hard, and sharp, and very cold, moreover so grievous to my legs that it needed my very best doctrine and humour to forbear from swearing, in the manner they use in London. But when I arose, and felt it, and knew it to be a culverin, I was somewhat

reassured thereby ; inasmuch as it was not likely that they would plant this engine, except in the real and true entrance.

Therefore I went on again, more painfully and wearily, and presently found it to be good that I had received that knock, and borne it with such patience ; for otherwise I might have blundered full upon the sentries, and been shot without more ado. As it was, I had barely time to draw back, as I turned a corner upon them ; and if their lanthorn had been in its place, they could scarce have failed to descry me ; unless indeed I had seen the gleam, before I turned the corner.

There seemed to be only two of them, of size indeed and stature as all the Doones must be, but I need not have feared to encounter them both, had they been unarmed, as I was. It was plain, however, that each had a long and heavy carbine, not in his hands (as it should have been), but standing close beside him. Therefore it behoved me now to be exceeding careful ; and even that might scarce avail, without luck in proportion. So I kept well back at the corner, and laid one cheek to the rock face, and kept my outer eye round the jut, in the wariest mode I could compass, watching my opportunity : and this is what I saw.

The two villains looked very happy—which villains have no right to be, but often are, meseemeth—they were sitting in a niche of rock, with the lanthorn in the corner, quaffing something from glass measures, and playing at push-pin, or shepherd's chess, or basset ;

or some trivial game of that sort. Each was smoking a long clay pipe, quite of new London shape I could see, for the shadow was thrown out clearly ; and each would laugh from time to time, as he fancied he got the better of it. One was sitting with his knees up, and left hand on his thigh ; and this one had his back to me, and seemed to be the stouter. The other leaned more against the rock, half sitting and half astraddle, and wearing leathern overalls, as if newly come from riding. I could see his face quite clearly by the light of the open lanthorn, and a handsomer or a bolder face I had seldom, if ever, set eyes upon ; insomuch that it made me very unhappy, to think of his being so near my Lorna.

“ How long am I to stay crouching here ? ” I asked of myself at last ; being tired of hearing them cry, “ score one,” “ score two,” “ No, by ——, Charlie.” “ By —— I say it is, Phelps.” And yet my only chance of slipping by them unperceived, was to wait till they quarrelled more, and came to blows about it. Presently as I made up my mind to steal along towards them (for the cavern was pretty wide, just there), Charlie, or Charleworth Doone, the younger and taller man, reached forth his hand to seize the money, which he swore he had won that time. Upon this, the other jerked his arm, vowing that he had no right to it ; whereupon Charlie flung at his face the contents of the glass he was sipping, but missed him and hit the candle, which sputtered with a flare of blue flame (from the strength perhaps

of the spirit) and then went out completely. At this, one swore, and the other laughed ; and before they had settled what to do, I was past them and round the corner.

And then, like a giddy fool as I was, I needs must give them a startler—the whoop of an owl, done so exactly, as John Fry had taught me, and echoed by the roof so fearfully, that one of them dropped the tinder box, and the other caught up his gun and cocked it, at least as I judged by the sounds they made. And then, too late, I knew my madness, for if either of them had fired, no doubt but what all the village would have risen and rushed upon me. However, as the luck of the matter went, it proved for my advantage ; for I heard one say to the other ;

“ Curse it, Charlie, what was that ? It scared me so, I have dropped my box ; my flint is gone, and everything. Will the brimstone catch from your pipe, my lad ? ”

“ My pipe is out, Phelps, ever so long. Damn it, I am not afraid of an owl, man. Give me the lanthorn, and stay here. I’m not half done with you yet, my friend.”

“ Well said, my boy, well said ! Go straight to Carver’s, mind you. The other sleepy-heads be snoring, as there is nothing up to-night. No dallying now under Captain’s window. Queen will have nought to say to you ; and Carver will punch your head into a new wick for your lanthorn.”

“ Will he though ? Two can play at that.” And

so after some rude jests, and laughter, and a few more oaths, I heard Charlie (or at any rate somebody) coming toward me, with a loose and not too sober footfall. As he reeled a little in his gait, and I would not move from his way one inch, after his talk of Lorna, but only longed to grasp him (if common sense permitted it) his braided coat came against my thumb, and his leatheren gaiters brushed my knee. If he had turned or noticed it, he would have been a dead man in a moment ; but his drunkenness saved him.

So I let him reel on unharmed ; and thereupon it occurred to me that I could have no better guide, passing as he would exactly where I wished to be ; that is to say under Lorna's window. Therefore I followed him, without any especial caution ; and soon I had the pleasure of seeing his form against the moonlit sky. Down a steep and winding path, with a handrail at the corners (such as they have at Ilfracombe), Master Charlie tripped along—and indeed there was much tripping, and he must have been an active fellow to recover as he did—and after him walked I, much hoping (for his own poor sake) that he might not turn and espy me.

But Bacchus (of whom I read at school, with great wonder about his meaning—and the same I may say of Venus) that great deity preserved Charlie, his pious worshipper, from regarding consequences. So he led me very kindly to the top of the meadow land, where the stream from underground broke forth, seething quietly with a little hiss of bubbles. Hence I had

fair view and outline of the robbers' township, spread with bushes here and there, but not heavily overshadowed. The moon, approaching now the full, brought the forms in manner forth, clothing each with character, as the moon (more than the sun) does, to an eye accustomed.

I knew that the Captain's house was first, both from what Lorna had said of it, and from my mother's description, and now again from seeing Charlie halt there for a certain time, and whistle on his fingers, and hurry on, fearing consequence. The tune that he whistled was strange to me, and lingered in my ears, as having something very new and striking and fantastic in it. And I repeated it softly to myself, while I marked the position of the houses and the beauty of the village. For the stream, in lieu of any street, passing between the houses, and affording perpetual change, and twinkling, and reflexions, moreover by its sleepy murmur soothing all the dwellers there, this and the snugness of the position, walled with rock and spread with herbage, made it look, in the quiet moonlight, like a little paradise. And to think of all the inmates there, sleeping with good consciences, having plied their useful trade of making others work for them, enjoying life without much labour, yet with great renown!

Master Charlie went down the village, and I followed him carefully, keeping as much as possible in the shadowy places, and watching the windows of every house, lest any light should be burning. As I

passed Sir Ensor's house, my heart leaped up, for I spied a window, higher than the rest above the ground, and with a faint light moving. This could hardly fail to be the room wherein my darling lay ; for here that impudent young fellow had gazed while he was whistling. And here my courage grew tenfold, and my spirit feared no evil—for lo, if Lorna had been surrendered to that scoundrel, Carver, she would not have been at her grandfather's house, but in Carver's accursed dwelling.

Warm with this idea, I hurried after Charleworth Doone, being resolved not to harm him now, unless my own life required it. And while I watched from behind a tree, the door of the furthest house was opened ; and sure enough it was Carver's self, who stood bare-headed, and half undressed, in the doorway. I could see his great black chest, and arms, by the light of the lamp he bore.

“Who wants me, this time of night ?” he grumbled in a deep gruff voice ; “any young scamp prowling after the maids shall have sore bones for his trouble.”

“All the fair maids are for thee, are they, Master Carver ?” Charlie answered laughing ; “we young scamps must be well-content with coarser stuff than though wouldest have.”

“Would have ? Ay, and will have ;” the great beast muttered angrily. “I bide my time ; but not very long. Only one word for thy good, Charlie. I will fling thee senseless into the river ; if ever I catch thy girl-face there again.”

“ Mayhap, Master Carver, it is more than thou couldst do. But I will not keep thee ; thou art not pleasant company to-night. All I want is a light for my lanthorn, and a glass of schnapps, if thou hast it.”

“ What is become of thy light then ? Good for thee, I am not on duty.”

“ A great owl flew between me and Phelps, as we watched beside the culverin, and so scared was he at our fierce bright eyes that he fell and knocked the light out.”

“ Likely tale, or likely lie, Charles ! We will have the truth to-morrow. Here take thy light, and be gone with thee. All virtuous men are in bed now.”

“ Then so will I be ; and why art thou not ? Ha, have I earned my schnapps now ?”

“ If thou hast, thou hast paid a bad debt : there is too much in thee already. Be off ! my patience is done with.”

Then he slammed the door in the young man’s face, having kindled his lanthorn by this time : and Charlie went up to the watch-place again, muttering as he passed me, “ Bad look-out for all of us, when that surly old beast is Captain. No gentle blood in him, no hospitality, not even pleasant language, nor a good new oath in his frowsy pate ! I’ve a mind to cut the whole of it ; and but for the girls I would so.”

My heart was in my mouth, as they say, when I stood in the shade by Lorna’s window, and whispered her name gently. The house was of one storey only, as the others were, with pine-ends standing forth the

stone, and only two rough windows upon that western side of it, and perhaps both of them were Lorna's. The Doones had been their own builders, for no one should know their ins and outs ; and of course their work was clumsy. As for their windows, they stole them mostly from the houses round about. But though the window was not very close, I might have whispered long enough, before she would have answered me ; frightened as she was, no doubt, by many a rude overture. And I durst not speak aloud, because I saw another watchman posted on the western cliff, and commanding all the valley. And now this man (having no companion for drinking or for gambling) espied me against the wall of the house, and advanced to the brink, and challenged me.

“ Who are you there ? Answer ! One, two, three ; and I fire at thee.”

The nozzle of his gun was pointed full upon me, as I could see, with the moonlight striking on the barrel ; he was not more than fifty yards off, and now he began to reckon. Being almost desperate about it, I began to whistle, wondering how far I should get before I lost my windpipe : and as luck would have it, my lips fell into that strange tune I had practised last ; the one I had heard from Charlie. My mouth would scarcely frame the notes, being parched with terror ; but to my surprise, the man fell back, dropped his gun, and saluted. Oh sweetest of all sweet melodies !

That tune was Carver Doone's passport (as I heard long afterwards), which Charleworth Doone had

imitated, for decoy of Lorna. The sentinel took me for that vile Carver; who was like enough to be prowling there, for private talk with Lorna; but not very likely to shout forth his name, if it might be avoided. The watchman, perceiving the danger perhaps of intruding on Carver's privacy, not only retired along the cliff, but withdrew himself to good distance.

Meanwhile he had done me the kindest service; for Lorna came to the window at once, to see what the cause of the shout was, and drew back the curtain timidly. Then she opened the rough lattice; and then she watched the cliff and trees; and then she sighed very sadly.

“Oh Lorna, don't you know me?” I whispered from the side, being afraid of startling her by appearing over suddenly.

Quick though she always was of thought, she knew me not from my whisper, and was shutting the window hastily, when I caught it back, and showed myself.

“John!” she cried, yet with sense enough not to speak aloud: “oh, you must be mad, John.”

“As mad as a March hare,” said I, “without any news of my darling. You knew I would come: of course you did.”

“Well, I thought, perhaps——you know: now, John, you need not eat my hand. Do you see they have put iron bars across?”

“To be sure. Do you think I should be contented, even with this lovely hand, but for these vile iron bars.

I will have them out before I go. Now, darling, for one moment—just the other hand, for a change, you know."

So I got the other, but was not honest ; for I kept them both, and felt their delicate beauty trembling, as I laid them to my heart.

" Oh, John, you will make me cry directly"—she had been crying long ago—" if you go on in that way. You know we can never have one another ; every one is against it. Why should I make you miserable ? Try not to think of me any more."

" And will you try the same of me, Lorna ? "

" Oh yes, John ; if you agree to it. At least I will try to try it."

" Then you won't try anything of the sort :" I cried with great enthusiasm, for her tone was so nice and melancholy : " the only thing we will try to try, is to belong to one another. And if we do our best, Lorna, God alone can prevent us."

She crossed herself, with one hand drawn free, as I spoke so boldly ; and something swelled in her little throat, and prevented her from answering.

" Now tell me," I said ; " what means all this. Why are you so pent up here ? Why have you given me no token ? Has your grandfather turned against you ? Are you in any danger ? "

" My poor grandfather is very ill : I fear that he will not live long. The Counsellor and his son are now the masters of the valley : and I dare not venture forth, for fear of anything they might do to me.

When I went forth, to signal for you, Carver tried to seize me; but I was too quick for him. Little Gwenny is not allowed to leave the valley now; so that I could send no message. I have been so wretched, dear, lest you should think me false to you. The tyrants now make sure of me. You must watch this house, both night and day, if you wish to save me. There is nothing they would shrink from, if my poor grandfather—oh, I cannot bear to think of myself, when I ought to think of him only; dying without a son to tend him, or a daughter to shed a tear."

"But surely he has sons enough; and a deal too many," I was going to say, but stopped myself in time: "why do none of them come to him?"

"I know not. I cannot tell. He is a very strange old man; and few have ever loved him. He was black with wrath at the Counsellor, this very afternoon—but I must not keep you here—you are much too brave, John; and I am much too selfish: there, what was that shadow?"

"Nothing more than a bat, darling, come to look for his sweetheart. I will not stay long; you tremble so: and yet for that very reason, how can I leave you, Lorna?"

"You must—you must"—she answered; "I shall die if they hurt you. I hear the old nurse moving. Grandfather is sure to send for me. Keep back from the window."

However, it was only Gwenny Carfax, Lorna's little

handmaid: my darling brought her to the window, and presented her to me, almost laughing through her grief.

“Oh, I am so glad, John; Gwenny, I am so glad you came. I have wanted long to introduce you to my ‘young man,’ as you call him. It is rather dark, but you can see him. I wish you to know him again, Gwenny.”

“Whoy!” cried Gwenny, with great amazement, standing on tiptoe to look out, and staring as if she were weighing me: “her be bigger nor any Doone! Heared as her have bate our Carnish champion awrastling. ‘Twadn’t fair play nohow: no, no; don’t tell me, ‘twadn’t fair play nohow.”

“True enough, Gwenny,” I answered her; for the play had been very unfair indeed on the side of the Bodmin champion: “it was not a fair bout, little maid; I am free to acknowledge that.” By that answer, or rather by the construction she put upon it, the heart of the Cornish girl was won, more than by gold and silver.

“I shall knoo thee again, young man; no fear of that;” she answered, nodding with an air of patronage. “Now, missis, gae on coortin’, and I wall gae outside and watch for ‘ee.” Though expressed not over delicately, this proposal arose, no doubt, from Gwenny’s sense of delicacy; and I was very thankful to her for taking her departure.

“She is the best little thing in the world,” said Lorna, softly laughing; “and the queerest, and the truest. Nothing will bribe her against me. If she seems to

be on the other side, never, never doubt her. Now no more of your ‘coortin,’ John! I love you far too well for that. Yes, yes, ever so much! If you will take a mean advantage of me. As much as ever you like to imagine; and then you may double it, after that. Only go, do go, good John; kind, dear, darling John; if you love me, go.”

“How can I go, without settling anything?” I asked, very sensibly: “How shall I know of your danger now? Hit upon something; you are so quick. Anything you can think of; and then I will go, and not frighten you.”

“I have been thinking long of something,” Lorna answered rapidly, with that peculiar clearness of voice, which made every syllable ring like music of a several note, “you see that tree with the seven rooks’ nests, bright against the cliffs there? Can you count them, from above, do you think? From a place where you will be safe, dear”—

“No doubt, I can; or if I cannot, it will not take me long to find a spot, whence I can do it.”

“Gwenny can climb like any cat. She has been up there in the summer, watching the young birds, day by day, and daring the boys to touch them. There are neither birds, nor eggs there now, of course, and nothing doing. If you see but six rooks’ nests; I am in peril and want you. If you see but five, I am carried off by Carver.”

“Good God!” said I, at the mere idea; in a tone which frightened Lorna.

“Fear not, John,” she whispered sadly, and my blood grew cold at it: “I have means to stop him; or at least to save myself. If you can come within one day of that man’s getting hold of me, you will find me quite unharmed. After that you will find me dead, or alive, according to circumstances, but in no case such that you need blush to look at me.”

Her dear sweet face was full of pride, as even in the gloom I saw: and I would not trespass on her feelings, by such a thing, at such a moment, as an attempt at any caress. I only said, “God bless you, darling!” and she said the same to me, in a very low sad voice. And then I stole below Carver’s house, in the shadow from the eastern cliff; and knowing enough of the village now to satisfy all necessity, betook myself to my well-known track in returning from the valley; which was neither down the waterslide (a course I feared in the darkness) nor up the cliffs at Lorna’s bower; but a way of my own inventing, which there is no need to dwell upon.

A weight of care was off my mind; though much of trouble hung there still. One thing was quite certain—if Lorna could not have John Ridd, no one else should have her. And my mother, who sate up for me, and with me long time afterwards, agreed that this was comfort.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN FRY had now six shillings a-week of regular and permanent wage, besides all harvest and shearing money, as well as a cottage rent-free, and enough of garden-ground to rear pot-herbs for his wife, and all his family. Now the wages appointed by our justices, at the time of sessions, were four-and-sixpence a-week for summer, and a shilling less for the winter-time ; and we could be fined, and perhaps imprisoned, for giving more than the sums so fixed. Therefore John Fry was looked upon as the richest man upon Exmoor, I mean of course among labourers, and there were many jokes about robbing him, as if he were the Mint of the king ; and Tom Faggus promised to try his hand, if he came across John on the highway, although he had ceased from business, and was seeking a Royal pardon.

Now is it according to human nature, or is it a thing contradictory (as I would fain believe) ? But any how, there was, upon Exmoor, no more discontented man, no man more sure that he had not his worth, neither

half so sore about it, than, or as, John Fry was. And one thing he did which I could not wholly (or indeed I may say, in any measure) reconcile with my sense of right; much as I laboured to do John justice, especially because of his roguery. And this was, that if we said too much, or accused him at al. of laziness (which he must have known to be in him), ne regularly turned round upon us, and quite compelled us to hold our tongues, by threatening to lay information against us for paying him too much wages !

Now I have not mentioned all this of John Fry, from any disrespect for his memory (which is green and honest amongst us), far less from any desire to hurt the feeling of his grandchildren; and I will do them the justice, once for all, to avow, thus publicly, that I have known a great many bigger rogues; and most of themselves in the number. But I have referred, with moderation, to this little flaw in a worthy character (or foible, as we call it, when a man is dead) for this reason only—that without it there was no explaining John's dealings with Jeremy Stickles.

Master Jeremy, being full of London and Norwich experience, fell into the error of supposing that we clods and yokels were the simplest of the simple, and could be cheated at his good pleasure. Now this is not so: when once we suspect that people have that idea of us, we indulge them in it to the top of their bent, and grieve that they should come out of it, as they do at last in amazement, with less money than before, and the laugh now set against them.

Ever since I had offended Jeremy, by threatening him (as before related) in case of his meddling with my affairs, he had more and more allied himself with simple-minded John, as he was pleased to call him. John Fry was everything: it was "run and fetch my horse, John"—"John, are my pistols primed well?"—"I want you in the stable, John, about something very particular;" until except for the rudeness of it, I was longing to tell Master Stickles that he ought to pay John's wages. John for his part was not backward, but gave himself the most wonderful airs of secrecy and importance, till half the parish began to think that the affairs of the nation were in his hand, and he scorned the sight of a dungfork.

It was not likely that this should last; and being the only man in the parish with any knowledge of politics, I gave John Fry to understand that he must not presume to talk so freely, as if he were at least a constable, about the constitution; which could be no affair of his, and might bring us all into trouble. At this he only tossed his nose, as if he had been in London at least three times for my one; which vexed me so that I promised him the thick end of the plough-whip, if even the name of a knight of the shire should pass his lips for a fortnight.

Now, I did not suspect in my stupid noddle that John Fry would ever tell Jeremy Stickles about the sight at the Wizard's Slough and the man in the white nightcap; because John had sworn on the blade of his knife not to breath a word to any soul, without my full

permission. However, it appears that John related, for a certain consideration, all that he had seen, and doubtless more which had accrued to it. Upon this Master Stickles was much astonished at Uncle Reuben's proceedings, having always accounted him a most loyal, keen, and wary subject.

All this I learned upon recovering Jeremy's good graces, which came to pass in no other way than by the saving of his life. Being bound to keep the strictest watch upon the seven rooks' nests, and yet not bearing to be idle and to waste my mother's stores, I contrived to keep my work entirely at the western corner of our farm, which was nearest to Glen Doone, and whence I could easily run to a height commanding the view I coveted.

One day Squire Faggus had dropped in upon us, just in time for dinner ; and very soon he and King's messenger were as thick as need be. Tom had brought his beloved mare to show her off to Annie, and he mounted his pretty sweetheart upon her, after giving Winnie notice to be on her very best behaviour. The squire was in great spirits, having just accomplished a purchase of land which was worth ten times what he gave for it ; and this he did by a merry trick upon old Sir Roger Bassett, who never supposed him to be in earnest, as not possessing the money. The whole thing was done on a bumper of claret in a tavern where they met ; and the old knight having once pledged his word, no lawyers could hold him back from it. They could only say that Master Faggus,

being attainted of felony, was not a capable grantee. "I will soon cure that," quoth Tom, "my pardon has been ready for months and months, so soon as I care to sue it."

And now he was telling our Annie, who listened very rosily, and believed every word he said, that, having been ruined in early innocence by the means of lawyers, it was only just, and fair turn for turn, that having become a match for them by long practice upon the highway, he should reinstate himself, at their expense, in society. And now he would go to London at once, and sue out his pardon; and then would his lovely darling Annie, &c., &c.—things which I had no right to hear, and in which I was not wanted.

Therefore I strode away up the lane to my afternoon's employment, sadly comparing my love with theirs (which now appeared so prosperous), yet heartily glad for Annie's sake; only remembering now and then the old proverb, "Wrong never comes right."

I worked very hard in the copse of young ash, with my bill-hook and a shearing-knife; cutting out the saplings where they stoled too close together, making spars to keep for thatching, wall-crooks to drive into the cob, stiles for close sheep-hurdles, and handles for rakes, and hoes, and two-bills, of the larger and straighter stuff. And all the lesser I bound in faggots, to come home on the sledd to the woodrick. It is not to be supposed that I did all this work, without many peeps at the seven rooks' nests, which proved my

Lorna's safety. Indeed, whenever I wanted a change, either from cleaving, or hewing too hard, or stooping too much at binding, I was up and away to the ridge of the hill, instead of standing and doing nothing.

Soon I forgot about Tom and Annie; and fell to thinking of Lorna only; and how much I would make of her; and what I should call our children; and how I would educate them, to do honour to her rank: yet all the time I worked none the worse, by reason of meditation. Fresh-cut spars are not so good as those of a little seasoning; especially if the sap was not gone down at the time of cutting. Therefore we always find it needful to have plenty still in stock.

It was very pleasant there in the copse, sloping to the west as it was, and the sun descending brightly, with rocks and banks to dwell upon. The stems of mottled and dimpled wood, with twigs coming out like elbows, hung and clung together closely, with a mode of bending in, as children do at some danger; overhead the shrunken leaves quivered and rustled ripely, having many points like stars, and rising and falling delicately, as fingers play sad music. Along the bed of the slanting ground, all between the stools of wood, there were heaps of dead brown leaves, and sheltered mats of lichen, and drifts of spotted stick gone rotten, and tufts of rushes here and there, full of fray and feathering.

All by the hedge ran a little stream, a thing that could barely name itself, flowing scarce more than a pint in a minute, because of the sunny weather. Yet

had this rill little crooks and crannies, dark and bravely bearded, and a gallant rush through a reeden pipe—the stem of a flag that was grounded ; and here and there divided threads, from the points of a branching stick, into mighty pools of rock (as large as a grown man's hat almost) napped with moss all around the sides and hung with corded grasses. Along and down the tiny banks, and nodding into one another, even across main channel, hung the brown arcade of ferns ; some with gold tongues languishing ; some with countless ear-drops jerking ; some with great quilled ribs uprising and long saws aflapping ; others cupped, and fanning over with the grace of yielding, even as a hollow fountain spread by winds that have lost their way.

Deeply each beyond other, pluming, stooping, glancing, glistening, weaving softest pillow-lace, coying to the wind and water, where their fleeting image danced, or by which their beauty moved,—God has made no lovelier thing ; and only He takes heed of them.

It was time to go home to supper now, and I felt very friendly towards it, having been hard at work for some hours, with only the voice of the little rill, and some hares and a pheasant for company. The sun was gone down behind the black wood on the further cliffs of Bagworthy, and the russet of the tufts and spear-beds was becoming grey, while the greyness of the sapling ash grew brown against the sky ; the hollow curves of the little stream became black beneath the grasses and the fairy fans innumerable ; while outside the hedge our clover was crimping its leaves in the

dewfall, like the cocked hats of wood-sorrel,—when, thanking God for all this scene, because my love had gifted me with the key to all things lovely, I prepared to follow their example, and to rest from labour.

Therefore I wiped my bill-hook and shearing-knife very carefully, for I hate to leave tools dirty ; and was doubting whether I should try for another glance at the seven rooks' nests, or whether it would be too dark for it. It was now a quarter of an hour mayhap, since I had made any chopping noise, because I had been assorting my spars, and tying them in bundles, instead of plying the bill-hook ; and the gentle tinkle of the stream was louder than my doings. To this, no doubt, I owe my life, which then (without my dreaming it) was in no little jeopardy.

For, just as I was twisting the bine of my very last faggot, before tucking the cleft tongue under, there came three men outside the hedge, where the western light was yellow ; and by it I could see that all three of them carried fire-arms. These men were not walking carelessly, but following down the hedge-trough, as if to stalk some enemy : and for a moment it struck me cold to think it was I they were looking for. With the swiftness of terror I concluded that my visits to Glen Doone were known, and now my life was the forfeit.

It was a most lucky thing for me, that I heard their clothes catch in the brambles, and saw their hats under the rampart of ash, which is made by what we call “splashing,” and lucky for me that I stood in a goyal,

and had the dark coppice behind me. To this I had no time to fly, but with a sort of instinct, threw myself flat in among the thick fern, and held my breath, and lay still as a log. For I had seen the light gleam on their gun-barrels, and knowing the faults of the neighbourhood, would fain avoid swelling their number. Then the three men came to the gap in the hedge, where I had been in and out so often ; and stood up, and looked in over.

It is all very well for a man to boast that, in all his life, he has never been frightened, and believes that he never could be so. There may be men of that nature —I will not dare to deny it ; only I have never known them. The fright I was now in was horrible, and all my bones seemed to creep inside me ; when lying there helpless, with only a billet and the comb of fern to hide me, in the dusk of early evening, I saw three faces in the gap ; and what was worse, three gun-muzzles.

“Somebody been at work here—” it was the deep voice of Carver Doone ; “jump up, Charlie, and look about ; we must have no witnesses.”

“Give me a hand behind,” said Charlie, the same handsome young Doone I had seen that night ; “this bank is too devilish steep for me.”

“Nonsense man !” cried Marwood de Whichehalse ; who to my amazement was the third of the number ; “only a hind cutting faggots ; and of course he hath gone home long ago. Blind man’s holiday, as we call it. I can see all over the place ; and there is not even a rabbit there.”

At that I drew my breath again, and thanked God I had gotten my coat on.

“Squire is right,” said Charlie, who was standing up high (on a root perhaps), “there is nobody there now, captain; and lucky for the poor devil that he keepeth workman’s hours. Even his chopper is gone, I see.”

“No dog, no man, is the rule about here, when it comes to coppice work,” continued young de Whichehalse; “there is not a man would dare work there, without a dog to scare the pixies.”

“There is a big young fellow upon this farm,” Carver Doone muttered sulkily; “with whom I have an account to settle, if ever I come across him. He hath a cursed spite to us, because we shot his father. He was going to bring the lumpers upon us, only he was afeared, last winter. And he hath been in London lately, for some traitorous job, I doubt.”

“Oh, you mean that fool, John Ridd,” answered the young squire; “a very simple clod-hopper. No treachery in him, I warrant; he hath not the head for it. All he cares about is wrestling. As strong as a bull, and with no more brains.”

“A bullet for that bull,” said Carver; and I could see the grin on his scornful face; “a bullet for ballast to his brain, the first time I come across him.”

“Nonsense, captain! I won’t have him shot, for he is my old school-fellow, and hath a very pretty sister. But his cousin is of a different mould, and ten times as dangerous.”

“We shall see, lads, we shall see,” grumbled the great black-bearded man. “Ill bodes for the fool that would hinder me. But come, let us onward. No lingering, or the viper will be in the bush from us. Body and soul, if he give us the slip, both of you shall answer it.”

“No fear, captain, and no hurry,” Charlie answered gallantly; “would I were as sure of living a twelve-month, as he is of dying within the hour! Extreme unction for him in my bullet patch. Remember, I claim to be his confessor, because he hath insulted me.”

“Thou art welcome to the job for me,” said Marwood, as they turned away, and kept along the hedge-row; “I love to meet a man sword to sword; not to pop at him from a foxhole.”

What answer was made I could not hear, for by this time the stout ashen hedge was between us, and no other gap to be found in it, until at the very bottom, where the corner of the copse was. Yet I was not quit of danger now; for they might come through that second gap, and then would be sure to see me, unless I crept into the uncut thicket, before they could enter the clearing. But in spite of all my fear, I was not wise enough to do that. And in truth the words of Carver Doone had filled me with such anger, knowing what I did about him and his pretence to Lorna; and the sight of Squire Marwood, in such outrageous company, had so moved my curiosity, and their threats against some unknown person so aroused my pity, that

much of my prudence was forgotten, or at least the better part of courage, which loves danger at long distance.

Therefore, holding fast my bill-hook, I dropped myself very quietly into the bed of the runnel, being resolved to take my chance of their entrance at the corner, where the water dived through the hedge-row. And so I followed them down the fence, as gently as a rabbit goes ; only I was inside it, and they on the outside ; but yet so near that I heard the branches rustle as they pushed them.

Perhaps I had never loved ferns so much, as when I came to the end of that little gully, and stooped betwixt two patches of them, now my chiefest shelter ; for cattle had been through the gap just there, in quest of fodder and coolness, and had left but a mound of trodden earth between me and the outlaws. I mean at least on my left hand (upon which side they were), for in front where the brook ran out of the copse was a good stiff hedge of holly. And now I prayed heaven to lead them straight on ; for if they once turned to their right, through the gap, the muzzles of their guns would come almost against my forehead.

I heard them, for I durst not look ; and could scarce keep still, for trembling—I heard them trampling outside the gap ; uncertain which track they should follow. And in that fearful moment, with my soul almost looking out of my body, expecting notice to quit it, what do you think I did ? I counted the

threads in a spider's web, and the flies he had lately eaten, as their skeletons shook in the twilight.

"We shall see him better in there," said Carver, in his horrible gruff voice, like the creaking of the gallows chain; "sit there, behind holly hedge, lads, while he cometh down yonder hill; and then our good evening to him; one at his body, and two at his head; and good aim, lest we baulk the devil."

"I tell you, captain, that will not do," said Charlie, almost whispering: "you are very proud of your skill, we know, and can hit a lark if you see it: but he may not come until after dark, and we cannot be too nigh to him. This holly hedge is too far away. He crosses down here from Slocombe Slade, not from Tibbacot, I tell you; but along that track to the left there, and so by the foreland to Glenthorne, where his boat is in the cove. Do you think I have tracked him so many evenings, without knowing his line to a hair? Will you fool away all my trouble?"

"Come then, lad; we will follow thy lead. Thy life for his, if we fail of it."

"After me then, right into the hollow; thy legs are growing stiff, captain."

"So shall thy body be, young man, if thou leadest me astray in this."

I heard them stumbling down the hill, which was steep and rocky in that part; and peering through the hedge, I saw them enter a covert, by the side of the track which Master Stickles followed, almost every evening, when he left our house upon business. And

then I knew who it was they were come on purpose to murder—a thing which I might have guessed long before, but for terror and cold stupidity.

“Oh, that God,” I thought for a moment, waiting for my blood to flow; “oh, that God had given me brains, to meet such cruel dastards according to their villany! The power to lie, and the love of it; the stealth to spy, and the glory in it; above all, the quiet relish for blood, and joy in the death of an enemy—these are what any man must have, to contend with the Doones upon even terms. And yet, I thank God that I have not any of these.”

It was no time to dwell upon that, only to try, if might be, to prevent the crime they were bound upon. To follow the armed men down the hill would have been certain death to me, because there was no covert there, and the last light hung upon it. It seemed to me that my only chance to stop the mischief pending was to compass the round of the hill, as fast as feet could be laid to ground; only keeping out of sight from the valley, and then down the rocks, and across the brook, to the track from Slocombe Slade; so as to stop the king’s messenger from travelling any further, if only I could catch him there.

And this was exactly what I did; and a terrible run I had for it, fearing at every step to hear the echo of shots in the valley, and dropping down the scrubby rocks with tearing and violent scratching. Then I crossed Bagworthy stream, not far below Doone-valley, and breasted the hill towards Slocombe Slade, with my

heart very heavily panting. Why Jeremy chose to ride this way, instead of the more direct one (which would have been over Oare-hill), was more than I could account for: but I had nothing to do with that; all I wanted was to save his life.

And this I did by about a minute; and (which was the hardest thing of all) with a great horse-pistol at my head, as I seized upon his bridle.

“Jeremy, Jerry,” was all I could say, being so fearfully short of breath; for I had crossed the ground quicker than any horse could.

“Spoken, just in time, John Ridd!” cried Master Stickles, still however pointing the pistol at me: “I might have known thee by thy size, John. What art doing here?”

“Come to save your life. For God’s sake, go no further. Three men in the covert there, with long guns, waiting for thee.”

“Ha! I have been watched of late. That is why I pointed at thee, John. Back round this corner, and get thy breath, and tell me all about it. I never saw a man so hurried. I could beat thee now, John.”

Jeremy Stickles was a man of courage, and presence of mind, and much resource: otherwise he would not have been appointed for this business: nevertheless he trembled greatly, when he heard what I had to tell him. But I took good care to keep back the name of young Marwood de Whichehalse; neither did I show my knowledge of the other men; for reasons of my own not very hard to conjecture.

“We will let them cool their heels, John Ridd,” said Jeremy, after thinking a little. “I cannot fetch my musketeers either from Glenthorne or Lynmouth, in time to seize the fellows. And three desperate Doones, well-armed, are too many for you and me. One result this attempt will have, it will make us attack them sooner than we had intended. And one more it will have, good John, it will make me thy friend for ever. Shake hands, my lad, and forgive me freely for having been so cold to thee. Mayhap, in the troubles coming, it will help thee not a little to have done me this good turn.”

Upon that he shook me by the hand, with a pressure such as we feel not often ; and having learned from me how to pass quite beyond view of his enemies, he rode on to his duty, whatever it might be. For my part I was inclined to stay, and watch how long the three fusileers would have the patience to lie in wait ; but seeing less and less use in that, as I grew more and more hungry, I swung my coat about me, and went home to Plover’s Barrows.

CHAPTER XI.

STICKLES took me aside the next day, and opened all his business to me, whether I would or not. But I gave him clearly to understand that he was not to be vexed with me, neither to regard me as in any way dishonest, if I should use for my own purpose, or for the benefit of my friends, any part of the knowledge and privity thus enforced upon me. To this he agreed quite readily; but upon the express provision that I should do nothing to thwart his schemes, neither unfold them to any one; but otherwise be allowed to act according to my own conscience, and as consisted with the honour of a loyal gentleman—for so he was pleased to term me. Now what he said lay in no great compass, and may be summed in smaller still; especially as people know the chief part of it already. Disaffection to the King, or rather dislike to his brother James, and fear of Roman ascendancy, had existed now for several years, and of late were spreading rapidly; partly through the downright arrogance of the Tory faction, the cruelty and austerity of the Duke of York, the

corruption of justice, and confiscation of ancient rights and charters ; partly through jealousy of the French king, and his potent voice in our affairs ; and partly (or perhaps one might even say, mainly) through that natural tide in all political channels, which verily moves as if it had the moon itself for its mistress. No sooner is a thing done and fixed, being set far in advance perhaps of all that was done before (like a new mole in the sea), but immediately the waters retire, lest they should undo it ; and every one says how fine it is, but leaves other people to walk on it. Then after awhile, the vague endless ocean, having retired and lain still without a breeze or murmur, frets and heaves again with impulse, or with lashes laid on it, and in one great surge advances over every rampart.

And so there was, at the time I speak of, a great surge in England, not rolling yet, but seething : and one which a thousand Chief Justices, and a million Jeremy Stickles, should never be able to stop or turn, by stringing up men in front of it ; any more than a rope of onions can repulse a volcano. But the worst of it was that this great movement took a wrong channel at first ; not only missing legitimate line, but roaring out that the back ditchway was the true and established course of it.

Against this rash and random current nearly all the ancient mariners of the State were set ; not to allow the brave ship to drift there, though some little boats might try it. For the present there seemed to be a pause, with no open onset, but people on the shore

expecting, each according to his wishes, and the feel of his own finger, whence the rush of wind should come which might direct the water.

Now,—to reduce high figures of speech into our own little numerals,—all the towns of Somersetshire and half the towns of Devonshire were full of pushing eager people, ready to swallow anything, or to make others swallow it. Whether they believed the folly about the black box, and all that stuff, is not for me to say ; only one thing I know, they pretended to do so, and persuaded the ignorant rustics. Taunton, Bridgewater, Minehead, and Dulverton took the lead of the other towns in utterance of their discontent, and threats of what they meant to do if ever a Papist dared to climb the Protestant throne of England. On the other hand, the Tory leaders were not as yet under apprehension of an immediate outbreak, and feared to damage their own cause by premature coercion, for the struggle was not very likely to begin in earnest during the life of the present King ; unless he should (as some people hoped) be so far emboldened as to make public profession of the faith which he held (if any). So the Tory policy was to watch, not indeed permitting their opponents to gather strength, and muster in armed force or with order, but being well apprised of all their schemes and intended movements, to wait for some bold overt act, and then to strike severely. And as a Tory watchman—or spy, as the Whigs would call him—Jeremy Stickles was now among us ; and his duty was threefold.

First, and most ostensibly, to see to the levying of

poundage in the little haven of Lynmouth, and further up the coast, which was now becoming a place of resort for the folk whom we call smugglers, that is to say, who land their goods without regard to King's revenue as by law established. And indeed there had been no officer appointed to take toll, until one had been sent to Minehead, not so very long before. The excise as well (which had been ordered in the time of the Long Parliament) had been little heeded by the people hereabouts.

Second, his duty was (though only the Doones had discovered it) to watch those outlaws narrowly, and report of their manners (which were scanty), doings (which were too manifold), reputation (which was execrable), and politics, whether true to the King and the Pope, or otherwise.

Jeremy Stickles' third business was entirely political; to learn the temper of our people and the gentle families, to watch the movements of the trained bands (which could not always be trusted), to discover any collecting of arms and drilling of men among us, to prevent (if need were, by open force) any importation of gunpowder, of which there had been some rumour; in a word, to observe and forestall the enemy.

Now, in providing for this last-mentioned service, the Government had made a great mistake, doubtless through their anxiety to escape any public attention. For all the disposable force at their emissary's command amounted to no more than a score of musketeers, and these so divided along the coast as scarcely to

suffice for the duty of sentinels. He held a commission, it is true, for the employment of the train-bands, but upon the understanding that he was not to call upon them (except as a last resource) for any political object ; although he might use them against the Doones as private criminals, if found needful ; and supposing that he could get them.

“ So you see, John,” he said, in conclusion ; “ I have more work than tools to do it with. I am heartily sorry I ever accepted such a mixed and meagre commission. At the bottom of it lies (I am well convinced) not only the desire to keep things quiet, but the paltry jealousy of the military people. Because I am not a Colonel, forsooth, or a Captain in His Majesty’s service, it would never do to trust me with a company of soldiers ! And yet they would not send either Colonel or Captain, for fear of a stir in the rustic mind. The only thing that I can do, with any chance of success, is to rout out these vile Doone fellows, and burn their houses over their heads. Now, what think you of that, John Ridd ? ”

“ Destroy the town of the Doones,” I said ; “ and all the Doones inside it ! Surely, Jeremy, you would never think of such a cruel act as that ! ”

“ A cruel act, John ! It would be a mercy for at least three counties. No doubt you folk, who live so near, are well accustomed to them, and would miss your liveliness in coming home after nightfall, and the joy of finding your sheep and cattle right, when you not expected it. But after awhile you might get used

to the dulness of being safe in your beds, and not losing your sisters and sweethearts. Surely, on the whole, it is as pleasant not to be robbed as to be robbed?"

"I think we should miss them very much," I answered, after consideration; for the possibility of having no Doones had never yet occurred to me, and we all were so thoroughly used to them, and allowed for it in our year's reckoning; "I am sure we should miss them very sadly; and something worse would come of it."

"Thou art the staunchest of all staunch Tories," cried Stickles, laughing, as he shook my hand; "thou believest in the divine right of robbers, who are good enough to steal thy own fat sheep. I am a jolly Tory, John; but thou art ten times jollier: oh! the grief in thy face at the thought of being robbed no longer!"

He laughed in a very unseemly manner; while I despaired nothing to laugh about. For we always like to see our way; and a sudden change upsets us. And unless it were in the loss of the farm, or the death of the King, or of Betty Muxworthy, there was nothing that could so unsettle our minds as the loss of the Doones of Bagworthy.

And beside all this, I was thinking, of course, and thinking more than all the rest, about the troubles that might ensue to my own beloved Lorna. If an attack of Glen Doone were made by savage soldiers and rude train-bands, what might happen, or what might not, to my delicate, innocent darling? There-

fore, when Jeremy Stickles again placed the matter before me, commanding my strength, and courage, and skill (to flatter me of the highest), and finished by saying that I would be worth at least four common men to him, I cut him short as follows:—

“Master Stickles, once for all, I will have nought to do with it. The reason why is no odds of thine, nor in any way disloyal. Only in thy plans remember that I will not strike a blow, neither give any counsel, neither guard any prisoners.”

“Not strike a blow,” cried Jeremy, “against thy father’s murderers, John !”

“Not a single blow, Jeremy ; unless I knew the man who did it, and he gloried in his sin. It was a foul and dastard deed, yet not done in cold blood ; neither in cold blood will I take God’s task of avenging it.”

“Very well, John,” answered Master Stickles ; “I know thine obstinacy. When thy mind is made up, to argue with thee is pelting a rock with peppercorns. But thou hast some other reason, lad, unless I am much mistaken, over and above thy merciful nature and Christian forgiveness. Anyhow, come and see it, John. There will be good sport, I reckon ; especially when we thrust our claws into the nest of the ravens. Many a yeoman will find his daughter, and some of the Porlock lads their sweethearts. A nice young maiden, now, for thee, John ; if, indeed, any”—

“No more of this !” I answered very sternly : “it is no business of thine, Jeremy ; and I will have no joking upon this matter.”

“Good, my lord: so be it. But one thing I tell thee in earnest. We will have thy old double-dealing uncle, Huckaback of Dulverton, and march him first to assault Doone Castle, sure as my name is Stickles. I hear that he hath often vowed to storm the valley himself, if only he could find a dozen musketeers to back him. Now, we will give him chance to do it, and prove his loyalty to the King, which lies under some suspicion of late.”

With regard to this, I had nothing to say; for it seemed to me very reasonable that Uncle Reuben should have first chance of recovering his stolen goods, about which he had made such a sad todo, and promised himself such vengeance. I made bold however to ask Master Stickles at what time he intended to carry out this great and hazardous attempt. He answered that he had several things requiring first to be set in order, and that he must make an inland journey, even as far as Tiverton, and perhaps Crediton and Exeter, to collect his forces and ammunition for them. For he meant to have some of the yeomanry as well as of the trained bands, so that if the Doones should sally forth, as perhaps they would, on horseback, cavalry might be there to meet them, and cut them off from returning.

All this made me very uncomfortable, for many and many reasons, the chief and foremost being of course my anxiety about Lorna. If the attack succeeded, what was to become of her? Who would rescue her from the brutal soldiers, even supposing that she

escaped from the hands of her own people, during the danger and ferocity? And in smaller ways, I was much put out; for instance, who would insure our corn-ricks, sheep, and cattle, ay and even our fat pigs, now coming on for bacon, against the spreading all over the country of unlicensed marauders? The Doones had their rights, and understood them, and took them according to prescription, even as the parsons had, and the lords of manors, and the King himself, God save him! But how were these low soldiering follows (half-starved at home very likely, and only too glad of the fat of the land, and ready, according to our proverb, to burn the paper they fried in), who were they, to come hectoring, and hero-ing over us, and Heliogabalizing, with our pretty sisters to cook for them, and be chucked under chin perhaps afterwards. There is nothing England hates so much, according to my sense of it, as that fellows taken from plough-tail, cart-tail, pot-houses, and parish-stocks, should be hoisted and foisted upon us (after a few months' drilling, and their lying shaped into truckling) as defenders of the public weal, and heroes of the universe.

In another way, I was vexed moreover—for after all we must consider the opinions of our neighbours—namely, that I knew quite well how everybody for ten miles round (for my fame must have been at least that wide, after all my wrestling), would lift up hands and cry out thus—“Black shame on John Ridd, if he lets them go without him!”

Putting all these things together, as well as many others, which your own wits will suggest to you, it is impossible but what you will freely acknowledge that this unfortunate John Ridd was now in a cloven stick. There was Lorna, my love and life, bound by her duty to that old vil——nay, I mean to her good grandfather, who could now do little mischief, and therefore deserved all praise—Lorna bound, at any rate, by her womanly feelings, if not by sense of duty, to remain in the thick of danger, with nobody to protect her, but everybody to covet her, for beauty and position. Here was all the country roused with violent excitement, at the chance of snapping at the Doones; and not only getting tit for tat; but every young man promising his sweetheart a gold chain, and his mother at least a shilling. And here was our own mow-yard, better filled than we could remember, and perhaps every sheaf in it destined to be burned or stolen, before we had finished the bread we had baked.

Among all these troubles, there was however, or seemed to be, one comfort. Tom Faggus returned from London very proudly and very happily, with a royal pardon in black and white, which everybody admired the more, because no one could read a word of it. The Squire himself acknowledged cheerfully that he could sooner take fifty purses than read a single line of it. Some people indeed went so far as to say that the parchment was made from a sheep Tom had stolen, and that was why it prevaricated so in giving him a character. But I, knowing something, by this

time, of lawyers, was able to contradict them ; affirming that the wolf had more than the sheep to do with this matter.

For, according to our old saying, the three learned professions live by roguery on the three parts of a man. The doctor mauls our bodies ; the parson starves our souls ; but the lawyer must be the adroitest knave, for he has to ensnare our minds. Therefore he takes a careful delight in covering his traps and engines with a spread of dead-leaf words, whereof himself knows little more than half the way to spell them.

But now Tom Faggus, although having wit to gallop away on his strawberry mare, with the speed of terror, from lawyers (having paid them with money too honest to stop), yet fell into a reckless adventure, ere ever he came home ; from which any lawyer would have saved him, although he ought to have needed none beyond common thought for dear Annie. Now I am, and ever have been, so vexed about this story that I cannot tell it pleasantly (as I try to write in general) in my own words and manner. Therefore I will let John Fry (whom I have robbed of another story, to which he was more entitled ; and whom I have robbed of many speeches (which he thought very excellent), lest I should grieve any one with his lack of education,—the last lack he ever felt, by-the-by), now with your good leave, I will allow poor John to tell this tale, in his own words and style ; which he has a perfect right to do, having been the first to tell us. For Squire Faggus kept it close ; not trusting even Annie with it (or at least

she said so); because no man knows much of his sweet-heart's tongue, until she has borne him a child or two.

Only, before John begins his story, this I would say, in duty to him, and in common honesty,—that I dare not write down some few of his words, because they are not convenient, for dialect or other causes; and that I cannot find any way of spelling many of the words which I do repeat, so that people, not born on Exmoor, may know how he pronounced them; even if they could bring their lips, and their legs, to the proper attitude. And in this I speak advisedly; having observed some thousand times, that the manner a man has of spreading his legs, and bending his knees, or stiffening, and even the way he will set his heel, make all the difference in his tone, and time of casting his voice aright, and power of coming home to you.

We always liked John's stories, not for any wit in them; but because we laughed at the man, rather than the matter. The way he held his head was enough, with his chin fixed hard like a certainty (especially during his biggest lie), not a sign of a smile in his lips or nose, but a power of not laughing; and his eyes not turning to anybody, unless somebody had too much of it (as young girls always do) and went over the brink of laughter. Thereupon it was good to see John Fry; how he looked gravely first at the laugher, as much as to ask “What is it now?” then if the fool went laughing more, as he or she was sure to do upon that dry enquiry, John would look again, to be sure of it; and then at somebody else to learn whether the laugh had

company. Then if he got another grin, all his mirth came out in glory, with a sudden break ; and he wiped his lips, and was grave again.

Now John, being too much encouraged by the girls (of which I could never break them), came into the house that December evening, with every inch of him full of a tale. Annie saw it, and Lizzie of course ; and even I, in the gloom of great evils, perceived that John was a loaded gun ; but I did not care to explode him. Now nothing primed him so hotly as this : if you wanted to hear all John Fry had heard, the surest of all sure ways to it was, to pretend not to care for a word of it.

“I wor over to Exeford in the marning,” John began from the chimney-corner, looking straight at Annie ; “for to zee a little calve, Jan, as us cuddn’t get thee to lave houze about. Meesus have got a quare vancy vor un, from wutt her have heer’d of the brade. Now zit quite, wull e’ Miss Luzzie, or a ’wunt goo on no vurder. Vaine little tayl I’ll tull’ ee, if so be thee zits quite. Wull, as I coom down the hill, I zeed a saight of volks astapping of the ro-udwai. Arl on ’em wi’ girt goons, or two men out of dree wi’ em. Rackon there wor dree score on ’em, tak smarl and beg togather laike ; latt aloun the women and chillers ; zum on ’em wi’ matches blowing, tothers wi’ flint-lacks. ‘Wutt be up now ?’ I says to Bill Blacksmith, as had knowledge of me : ‘be the King acoomin ? If her be, do ’ee want to shutt ’un ?’

“‘Thee not know !’ says Bill Blacksmith, just the

zame as I be a tullin of it: 'whai, man, us expex Tam Faggus, and zum on us manes to shutt 'un.'

" 'Shutt 'un wi'out a warrant!' says I: 'sure 'ee knaws better nor thic, Bill! A man mayn't shutt to another man, wi'out have a warrant, Bill. Warship zed so, last taime I zeed un, and nothing to the contrairy.'

" 'Haw, haw! Never frout about that,' saith Bill, zame as I be tullin you; 'us has warrants and warships enow, dree or vour on 'em. And more nor a dizzen warranties; fro'ut I know to contrairy. Shutt 'un, us manes; and shutt 'un, us will——' Whai, Miss Annie, good Lord, whutt iver maks 'ee stear so?"

" Nothing at all, John," our Annie answered; " only the horrible ferocity of that miserable blacksmith."

" That be nayther here nor there," John continued, with some wrath at his own interruption: " Blacksmith knawed whutt the Squire had been; and veared to lose his own custom, if Squire tuk to shooin' again. Shutt any man I would myzell as intervared wi' my trade laike. 'Lucky for thee,' said Bill Blacksmith, 'as thee bee'st so shart and fat, Jan. Dree on us wor a gooin' to shutt 'ee, till us zeed how fat thee waz, Jan.'

" 'Lor now, Bill!' I answered 'un, wi' a girt cold swat upon me: 'shutt me, Bill; and my own waife niver drame of it!'"

Here John Fry looked round the kitchen; for he had never said anything of the kind, I doubt; but now made it part of his discourse, from thinking that

Mistress Fry was come, as she generally did, to fetch him.

“Wull done then, Jan Vry,” said the woman, who had entered quietly, but was only our old Molly. “Wutt handsome manners thee hast gat, Jan, to spake so well of thy waife laike; after arl the laife she lades thee!”

“Putt thee pot on the fire, old ‘ooman, and bile thee own bakkon,” John answered her, very sharply: “nobody no raight to meddle wi’ a man’s bad ‘ooman but himzell. Wull, here was all these here men awaitin’, zum wi’ harses, zum wi’out; the common volk wi’ long girt guns, and the quarlity wi’ girt broad-swords. Who wor there? Whay latt me zee. There wor Squaire Maunder,” here John assumed his full historical key, “him wi’ the pot to his vittle-place; and Sir Richard Blewitt shaking over the zaddle, and Squaire Sandford of Lee, him wi’ the long nose and one eye, and Sir Gronus Batchildor over to Ninehead Court, and ever so many more on ‘em, tulling up how they was arl gooин’ to be promoted, for kitching of Tom Faggus.

“‘Hope to God,’ says I to myzell, ‘poor Tom wun’t coom here to-day: arl up with her, if ‘a doeth: and who be there to suckzade ‘un?’ Mark me now, all these charps was good to shutt ‘un, as her coom crass the watter; the watter be waide enow there and stony, but no deeper than my knee-place.

“‘Thee eas’n goo no vurder,’ Bill Blacksmith saith to me: ‘nawbody ’lowed to crass the vord, until such time as Faggus coom; plaise God us may mak sure of ‘un.’

“‘Amen, zo be it,’ says I; ‘God knowth I be never in any hurry, and would zooner stop nor goo on, most taimes.’

“‘Wi’ that I pulled my vittles out, and zat a horse-barck, atin’ of ‘em, and oncommon good they was. ‘Wont us have ‘un this taime just,’ saith Tim Potter, as keepeth the bull there; ‘and yet I be zorry for ‘un. But a man must kape the law, her must; zo be her can only larn it. And now poor Tom will swing as high as the tops of they girt hashes there.’

“‘Just thee kitch ‘un virst,’ says I; ‘maisure rope, wi’ the body to maisure by.’

“‘Hurrah! here be another now,’ saith Bill Blacksmith, grinning; ‘another coom to help us. What a grave gentleman! A warship of the pace, at laste!’

“For a gentleman, on a cue-ball horse, was coming slowly down the hill on tother zide of watter, looking at us in a friendly way, and with a long papper standing forth the lining of his coat laike. Horse stapped to drink in the watter, and gentleman spak to ‘un kindly, and then they coom raight on to ussen, and the gentleman’s face wor so long and so grave, us veared ‘a wor gooин’ to prache to us.

“‘Coort o’ King’s Bench,’ saith one man; ‘Checker and Plays,’ saith another; ‘Spishal Commission, I doubt,’ saith Bill Blacksmith; ‘backed by the Mayor of Taunton.’

“‘Any Justice of the King’s Peace, good people, to be found near here?’ said the gentleman, lifting his hat to us, and very gracious in his manner.

“‘Your honour,’ saith Bill, with his hat off his head; ‘there be sax or zeven warships here; arl on ‘em very wise ‘uns. Squaire Maunder, there be the zinnyer.’

“So the gentleman rode up to Squire Maunder, and raised his cocked hat in a manner, that took the Squire out of countenance, for he could not do the like of it.

“‘Sir,’ said he, ‘good and worshipful sir, I am here to claim your good advice and valour; for purposes of justice. I hold His Majesty’s commission, to make to cease a notorious rogue, whose name is Thomas Faggus.’ With that, he offered his commission; but Squire Maunder told the truth, that he could not rade even words in print, much less written karakters.* Then the other magistrates rode up, and put their heads together, how to meet the London gentleman without loss of importance. There wor one of ‘em as could rade purty vair, and her made out King’s mark upon it; and he bowed upon his horse to the gentleman, and he laid his hand on his heart and said, ‘Worshipful sir, we, as has the honour of His Gracious Majesty’s commission, are entirely at your service, and crave instructions from you.’

“Then a waving of hats began, and a bowing, and

* Lest I seem to under-rate the erudition of Devonshire magistrates, I venture to offer copy of a letter from a Justice of the Peace to his bookseller, circa 1810 A.D., now in my possession:—

“Sur.

plez to zen me the aks relatting to *A-justus-pahs.*”*

ED. of L. D.

* [Emphasised thus in original.]

making of legs to wan another, sich as nayver wor zeed afore ; but none of 'em arl, for air and brading, cud coom anaigh the gentleman with the long grave face.

“ ‘ Your warships have posted the men right well,’ saith he with another bow all round ; ‘ surely that big rogue will have no chance left among so many valiant musketeers. Ha ! what see I there, my friend ? Rust in the pan of your gun ! That gun would never go off, sure as I am the King’s Commissioner. And I see another just as bad ; and lo, there the third ! Pardon me, gentlemen, I have been so used to His Majesty’s Ordnance-yards. But I fear that bold rogue would ride through all of you, and laugh at your worships’ beards, by George.’

“ ‘ But what shall us do ? ’ Squire Maunder axed ; ‘ I veare there be no oil here.’

“ ‘ Discharge your pieces, gentlemen, and let the men do the same : or at least let us try to discharge them, and load again with fresh powder. It is the fog of the morning hath spoiled the priming. That rogue is not in sight yet : but God knows we must not be asleep with him, or what will His Majesty say to me, if we let him slip once more ? ’

“ ‘ Excellent, wondrous well said, good sir,’ Squire Maunder answered him ; ‘ I never should have thought of that now. Bill Blacksmith, tell all the men to be ready to shoot up into the air, directly I give the word. Now, are you ready there, Bill ? ’

“ ‘ All ready, your worship,’ saith Bill, saluting like a soldier.

“‘Then, one, two, dree, and shutt!’ cries Squire Mauder, standing up in the irons of his stirrups.

“Thereupon they all blazed out, and the noise of it went all round the hills; with a girt thick cloud arising, and all the air smelling of powder. Before the cloud was gone so much as ten yards on the wind, the gentleman on the cue-bald horse shuts up his face like a pair of nut-cracks, as wide as it was long before, and out he pulls two girt pistols longside of zaddle, and clap’th one to Squire Mauder’s head, and tother to Sir Richard Blewitt’s.

“‘Hand forth your money and all your warrants,’ he saith like a clap of thunder; ‘gentlemen, have you now the wit to apprehend Tom Faggus?’

“Squire Mauder swore so that he ought to be fined; but he pulled out his purse none the slower for that, and so did Sir Richard Blewitt.

“‘First man I see go to load a gun, I’ll gi’e ‘un the bullet to do it with,’ said Tom; for you see it was him and no other, looking quietly round upon all of them. Then he robbed all the rest of their warships, as pleasant as might be; and he saith, ‘Now, gentlemen, do your duty: serve your warrants afore you imprison me:’ with that he made them give up all the warrants, and he stuck them in the band of his hat, and then he made a bow with it.

“‘Good morning to your warships now, and a merry Christmas all of you! And the merrier both for rich and poor, when gentlemen see their almsgiving. Lest you deny yourselves the pleasure, I will aid your

warships. And to save you the trouble of following me, when your guns be loaded,—this is my strawberry mare, gentlemen, only with a little cream on her. Gentlemen all, in the name of the King, I thank you.'

"All this while he was casting their money among the poor folk by the handful ; and then he spak kaindly to the red mare, and wor over the back of the hill in two zeconds, and best part of two maile away, I reckon, afore ever a gun wor loaded."*

* The truth of this story is well established by first-rate tradition.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT story of John Fry's, instead of causing any amusement, gave us great disquietude ; not only because it showed that Tom Faggus could not resist sudden temptation and the delight of wildness, but also that we greatly feared lest the King's pardon might be annulled, and all his kindness cancelled, by a reckless deed of that sort. It was true (as Annie insisted continually, even with tears, to wear in her arguments) that Tom had not brought away anything, except the warrants, which were of no use at all, after receipt of the pardon ; neither had he used any violence, except just to frighten people ; but could it be established, even towards Christmas-time, that Tom had a right to give alms, right and left, out of other people's money ?

Dear Annie appeared to believe that it could ; saying that if the rich continually chose to forget the poor, a man who forced them to remember, and so to do good to themselves and to others, was a public benefactor, and entitled to every blessing. But I knew, and so

Lizzie knew—John Fry being now out of hearing—that this was not sound argument. For, if it came to that, any man might take the King by the throat, and make him cast away among the poor, the money which he wanted sadly for Her Grace the Duchess, and the beautiful Countess, of this, and of that. Lizzie, of course, knew nothing about His Majesty's diversions, which were not fit for a young maid's thoughts; but I now put the form of the argument as it occurred to me.

Therefore I said, once for all (and both my sisters always listened when I used the deep voice from my chest):—

“Tom Faggus hath done wrong herein; wrong to himself, and to our Annie. All he need have done was to show his pardon, and the magistrates would have rejoiced with him. He might have led a most godly life; and have been respected by everybody; and knowing how brave Tom is, I thought that he would have done as much. Now if I were in love with a maid”—I put it thus for the sake of poor Lizzie—“never would I so imperil my life, and her fortune in life along with me, for the sake of a poor diversion. A man's first duty is to the women, who are forced to hang upon him”—

“Oh John, not that horrible word,” cried Annie, to my great surprise, and serious interruption: “oh John, any word but that!” And she burst forth crying terribly.

“What word, Lizzie? What does the wench

mean?" I asked, in the saddest vexation; seeing no good to ask Annie at all, for she carried on most dreadfully.

"Don't you know, you stupid lout?" said Lizzie, completing my wonderment, by the scorn of her quicker intelligence: "if you don't know, axe about."

And with that, I was forced to be content; for Lizzie took Annie in such a manner (on purpose to vex me, as I could see) with her head drooping down, and her hair coming over, and tears and sobs rising and falling, to boot, without either order or reason; that seeing no good for a man to do (since neither of them was Lorna), I even went out into the courtyard, and smoked a pipe, and wondered what on earth is the meaning of women.

Now in this, I was wrong and unreasonable (as all women will acknowledge); but sometimes a man is so put out, by the way they take on about nothing, that he really cannot help thinking, for at least a minute, that women are a mistake for ever, and hence are for ever mistaken. Nevertheless I could not see that any of these great thoughts and ideas applied at all to my Lorna; but that she was a different being; not woman enough to do anything bad, yet enough of a woman for man to adore.

And now a thing came to pass which tested my adoration pretty sharply; inasmuch as I would far liefer have faced Carver Doone and his father, nay even the roaring lion himself, with his hoofs and flaming nostrils, than have met, in cold blood, Sir Ensor Doone,

the founder of all the colony, and the fear of the very fiercest.

But that I was forced to do at this time, and in the manner following. When I went up one morning to look for my seven rooks' nests, behold there were but six to be seen ; for the topmost of them all was gone, and the most conspicuous. I looked, and looked, and rubbed my eyes, and turned to try them by other sights ; and then I looked again ; yes, there could be no doubt about it ; the signal was made for me to come, because my love was in danger. For me to enter the valley now, during the broad daylight, could have brought no comfort, but only harm to the maiden, and certain death to myself. Yet it was more than I could do to keep altogether at distance ; therefore I ran to the nearest place where I could remain unseen, and watched the glen from the wooded height, for hours and hours, impatiently.

However, no impatience of mine made any difference in the scene upon which I was gazing. In the part of the valley which I could see, there was nothing moving, except the water, and a few stolen cows, going sadly along, as if knowing that they had no honest right there. It sank very heavily into my heart, with all the beds of dead leaves around it, and there was nothing I cared to do, except blow on my fingers, and long for more wit.

For a frost was beginning, which made a great difference to Lorna and to myself, I trow ; as well as to all the five million people who dwell in this

island of England; such a frost as never I saw before,* neither hope ever to see again; a time when it was impossible to milk a cow for icicles, or for a man to shave some of his beard (as I liked to do for Lorna's sake, because she was so smooth) without blunting his razor on hard grey ice. No man could "keep yatt" (as we say), even though he abandoned his work altogether, and thumped himself, all on the chest and the front, till his frozen hands would have been bleeding, except for the cold that kept still all his veins.

However, at present there was no frost, although for a fortnight threatening; and I was too young to know the meaning of the way the dead leaves hung, and the worm-casts prickling like women's combs, and the leaden tone upon everything, and the dead weight of the sky. Will Watcombe, the old man at Lynmouth, who had been half over the world almost, and who talked so much of the Gulf-stream, had (as I afterwards called to mind) foretold a very bitter winter this year. But no one would listen to him, because there were not so many hips and haws as usual; whereas we have all learned from our grandfathers, that Providence never sends very hard winters, without having furnished a large supply of berries for the birds to feed upon.

* If John Ridd lived until the year 1740 (as so strong a man was bound to do), he must have seen almost a harder frost; and perhaps it put an end to him; for then he would be some fourscore years old. But tradition makes him "keep yatt," as he says, up to fivescore years.—ED. L. D.

It was lucky for me, while I waited here, that our very best sheep-dog, old Watch, had chosen to accompany me that day. For otherwise I must have had no dinner, being unpersuaded, even by that, to quit my survey of the valley. However, by aid of poor Watch, I contrived to obtain a supply of food ; for I sent him home with a note to Annie fastened upon his chest ; and in less than an hour back he came, proud enough to wag his tail off, with his tongue hanging out from the speed of his journey, and a large lump of bread and of bacon fastened in a napkin around his neck. I had not told my sister, of course, what was toward ; for why should I make her anxious ?

When it grew towards dark, I was just beginning to prepare for my circuit around the hills ; but suddenly Watch gave a long low growl ; I kept myself close as possible, and ordered the dog to be silent, and presently saw a short figure approaching from a thickly-wooded hollow on the left side of my hiding-place. It was the same figure I had seen once before in the moonlight, at Plover's Barrows ; and proved, to my great delight, to be the little maid Gwenny Carfax. She started a moment, at seeing me, but more with surprise than fear ; and then she laid both her hands upon mine, as if she had known me for twenty years.

“ Young man,” she said, “ you must come with me. I was gwain’ all the way to fetch thee. Old man be dying ; and her can’t die, or at least her won’t, without first considering thee.”

“ Considering me !” I cried : “ what can Sir Ensor

Doone want with considering me? Has Mistress Lorna told him?"

"All concerning thee, and thy doings; when she knowed old man were so near his end. That vexed he was about thy low blood, a' thought her would come to life again, on purpose for to bate 'ee. But after all, there can't be scarcely such bad luck as that. Now, if her strook thee, thou must take it; there be no denaying of 'un. Fire I have seen afore, hot and red, and raging; but I never seen cold fire afore, and it maketh me burn and shiver."

And in truth, it made me both burn and shiver, to know that I must either go straight to the presence of Sir Ensor Doone, or give up Lorna, once for all, and rightly be despised by her. For the first time of my life, I thought that she had not acted fairly. Why not leave the old man in peace, without vexing him about my affairs? But presently I saw again that in this matter she was right; that she could not receive the old man's blessing (supposing that he had one to give, which even a worse man might suppose) while she deceived him about herself, and the life she had undertaken.

Therefore, with great misgiving of myself, but no ill thought of my darling, I sent Watch home, and followed Gwenny; who led me along very rapidly, with her short broad form gliding down the hollow, from which she had first appeared. Here at the bottom, she entered a thicket of grey ash stubs and black holly, with rocks around it gnarled with roots,

and hung with masks of ivy. Here in a dark and lonely corner, with a pixie ring before it, she came to a narrow door, very brown and solid, looking like a trunk of wood at a little distance. This she opened, without a key, by stooping down and pressing it, where the threshold met the jamb; and then she ran in very nimbly, but I was forced to be bent in two, and even so without comfort. The passage was close and difficult, and as dark as any black pitch; but it was not long (be it as it might) and in that there was some comfort. We came out soon at the other end, and were at the top of Doone-valley. In the chilly dusk air, it looked most untempting, especially during that state of mind under which I was labouring. As we crossed towards the Captain's house, we met a couple of great Doones lounging by the waterside. Gwenny said something to them, and although they stared very hard at me, they let me pass without hinderance. It is not too much to say that when the little maid opened Sir Ensor's door, my heart thumped, quite as much with terror, as with hope of Lorna's presence.

But in a moment the fear was gone, for Lorna was trembling in my arms, and my courage rose to comfort her. The darling feared beyond all things else, lest I should be offended with her, for what she had said to her grandfather, and for dragging me into his presence: but I told her almost a falsehood (the first, and the last, that ever I did tell her), to wit that I cared not that much—and showed her the tip of my thumb, as

I said it—for old Sir Ensor, and all his wrath; so long as I had his grand-daughter's love.

Now I tried to think this as I said it, so as to save it from being a lie; but somehow or other it did not answer, and I was vexed with myself both ways. But Lorna took me by the hand as bravely as she could, and led me into a little passage where I could hear the river moaning and the branches rustling.

Here I passed as long a minute as fear ever cheated time of, saying to myself continually that there was nothing to be frightened at, yet growing more and more afraid by reason of so reasoning. At last my Lorna came back very pale, as I saw by the candle she carried, and whispered, “Now be patient, dearest. Never mind what he says to you; neither attempt to answer him. Look at him gently and steadfastly, and, if you can, with some show of reverence; but above all things, no compassion; it drives him almost mad. Now come; walk very quietly.”

She led me into a cold dark room, rough and very gloomy, although with two candles burning. I took little heed of the things in it, though I marked that the window was open. That which I heeded was an old man, very stern and comely, with death upon his countenance; yet not lying in his bed, but set upright in a chair, with a loose red cloak thrown over him. Upon this his white hair fell, and his pallid fingers lay in a ghastly fashion without a sign of life or movement or of the power that kept him up; all rigid, calm, and relentless. Only in his great black eyes, fixed upon

me solemnly, all the power of his body dwelt, all the life of his soul was burning.

I could not look at him very nicely, being afeared of the death in his face, and most afeared to show it. And, to tell the truth, my poor blue eyes fell away from the blackness of his, as if it had been my coffin-plate. Therefore I made a low obeisance, and tried not to shiver. Only I groaned that Lorna thought it good manners to leave us two together.

“Ah,” said the old man; and his voice seemed to come from a cavern of skeletons; “are you that great John Ridd?”

“John Ridd is my name, your honour,” was all that I could answer; “and I hope your worship is better.”

“Child, have you sense enough to know what you have been doing?”

“Yes, I know right well,” I answered, “that I have set mine eyes far above my rank.”

“Are you ignorant that Lorna Doone is born of the oldest families remaining in North Europe?”

“I was ignorant of that, your worship; yet I knew of her high descent from the Doones of Bagworthy.”

The old man’s eyes, like fire, probed me whether I was jesting; then perceiving how grave I was, and thinking that I could not laugh (as many people suppose of me), he took on himself to make good the deficiency with a very bitter smile.

“And know you of your own low descent from the Ridds, of Oare?”

“Sir,” I answered, being as yet unaccustomed to

this style of speech, “the Ridds, of Oare, have been honest men twice as long as the Doones have been rogues.”

“I would not answer for that, John,” Sir Ensor replied, very quietly, when I expected fury. “If it be so, thy family is the very oldest in Europe. Now hearken to me, boy, or clown, or honest fool, or whatever thou art; hearken to an old man’s words, who has not many hours to live. There is nothing in this world to fear, nothing to revere or trust, nothing even to hope for; least of all, is there aught to love.”

“I hope your worship is not quite right,” I answered, with great misgivings; “else it is a sad mistake for anybody to live, sir.”

“Therefore,” he continued, as if I had never spoken, “though it may seem hard for a week or two, like the loss of any other toy, I deprive you of nothing, but add to your comfort, and (if there be such a thing) to your happiness, when I forbid you ever to see that foolish child again. All marriage is a wretched farce, even when man and wife belong to the same rank of life, have temper well assorted, similar likes and dislikes, and about the same pittance of mind. But when they are not so matched, the farce would become a long dull tragedy, if anything were worth lamenting. There, I have reasoned enough with you; I am not in the habit of reasoning. Though I have little confidence in man’s honour, I have some reliance in woman’s pride. You will pledge your word in Lorna’s presence never to see or to seek her again; never even

to think of her more. Now call her, for I am weary."

He kept his great eyes fixed upon me with their icy fire (as if he scorned both life and death), and on his haughty lips some slight amusement at my trouble ; and then he raised one hand (as if I were a poor dumb creature), and pointed to the door. Although my heart rebelled and kindled at his proud disdain, I could not disobey him freely ; but made a low salute, and went straightway in search of Lorna.

I found my love (or not my love ; according as now she should behave ; for I was very desperate, being put upon so sadly) Lorna Doone was crying softly at a little window, and listening to the river's grief. I laid my heavy arm around her, not with any air of claiming or of forcing her thoughts to me, but only just to comfort her, and ask what she was thinking of. To my arm she made no answer, neither to my seeking eyes ; but to my heart, once for all, she spoke with her own upon it. Not a word, nor sound between us ; not even a kiss was interchanged ; but man, or maid, who has ever loved hath learned our understanding.

Therefore it came to pass, that we saw fit to enter Sir Ensor's room, in the following manner. Lorna, with her right hand swallowed entirely by the palm of mine, and her waist retired from view by means of my left arm. All one side of her hair came down, in a way to be remembered, upon the left and fairest part of my favourite otter-skin waistcoat ; and her head as well would have lain there doubtless, but for the

danger of walking so. I, for my part, was too far gone to lag behind in the matter: but carried my love bravely, fearing neither death nor hell, while she abode beside me.

Old Sir Ensor looked much astonished. For forty years he had been obeyed and feared by all around him; and he knew that I had feared him vastly, before I got hold of Lorna. And indeed I was still afraid of him; only for loving Lorna so, and having to protect her.

Then I made him a bow, to the very best of all I had learned both at Tiverton and in London; after that I waited for him to begin, as became his age and rank in life.

“Ye two fools!” he said at last, with a depth of contempt which no words may express: “ye two fools!”

“May it please your worship,” I answered softly; “may be we are not such fools as we look. But though we be, we are well content, so long as we may be two fools together.”

“Why, John,” said the old man, with a spark, as of smiling in his eyes; “thou art not altogether the clumsy yokel, and the clod, I took thee for.”

“Oh no, grandfather; oh dear grandfather,” cried Lorna, with such zeal and flashing, that her hands went forward; “nobody knows what John Ridd is, because he is so modest. I mean, nobody except me, dear.” And here she turned to me again, and rose upon tiptoe, and kissed me.

“I have seen a little of the world,” said the old

man, while I was half ashamed, although so proud of Lorna ; “but this is beyond all I have seen, and nearly all I have heard of. It is more fit for southern climates than for the fogs of Exmoor.”

“It is fit for all the world, your worship ; with your honour’s good leave, and will,” I answered in humility, being still ashamed of it ; “when it happens so to people, there is nothing that can stop it, sir.”

Now Sir Ensor Doone was leaning back upon his brown chair-rail, which was built like a triangle, as in old farm-houses (from one of which it had come, no doubt, free from expense or gratitude); and as I spoke he coughed a little ; and he sighed a good deal more ; and perhaps his dying heart desired to open time again, with such a lift of warmth and hope, as he despaired in our eyes, and arms. I could not understand him then ; any more than a baby playing with his grandfather’s spectacles ; nevertheless I wondered whether, at his time of life, or rather on the brink of death, he was thinking of his youth and pride.

“Fools you are ; be fools for ever,” said Sir Ensor Doone at last ; while we feared to break his thoughts, but let each other know our own, with little ways of pressure : “it is the best thing I can wish you ; boy and girl, be boy and girl, until you have grandchildren.”

Partly in bitterness he spoke, and partly in pure weariness, and then he turned so as not to see us ; and his white hair fell, like a shroud, around him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL things being full of flaw, all things being full of holes, the strength of all things is in shortness. If Sir Ensor Doone had dwelled for half-an-hour upon himself, and an hour perhaps upon Lorna and me, we must both have wearied of him, and required change of air. But now I longed to see and know a great deal more about him, and hoped that he might not go to heaven, for at least a week or more. However he was too good for this world (as we say of all people who leave it); and I verily believe his heart was not a bad one, after all.

Evil he had done, no doubt, as evil had been done to him; yet how many have done evil, while receiving only good! Be that as it may; and not vexing a question (settled for ever without our votes), let us own that he was, at least, a brave and courteous gentleman.

And his loss aroused great lamentation, not among the Doones alone, and the women they had carried off, but also of the general public, and many even of the

magistrates, for several miles round Exmoor. And this, not only from fear lest one more wicked might succeed him (as appeared indeed too probable), but from true admiration of his strong will, and sympathy with his misfortunes.

I will not deceive any one, by saying that Sir Ensor Doone gave (in so many words) his consent to my resolve about Lorna. This he never did, except by his speech last written down ; from which as he mentioned grandchildren, a lawyer perhaps might have argued it. Not but what he may have meant to bestow on us his blessing ; only that he died next day, without taking the trouble to do it.

He called indeed for his box of snuff, which was a very high thing to take ; and which he never took without being in very good humour, at least for him. And though it would not go up his nostrils, through the failure of his breath, he was pleased to have it there, and not to think of dying.

“ Will your honour have it wiped ? ” I asked him very softly, for the brown appearance of it spoiled (to my idea) his white mostacchio ; but he seemed to shake his head, and I thought it kept his spirits up. I had never before seen any one do, what all of us have to do some day ; and it greatly kept my spirits down, although it did not so very much frighten me.

For it takes a man but a little while, his instinct being of death perhaps, at least as much as of life (which accounts for his slaying his fellow men so, and every other creature), it does not take a man very long

to enter into another man's death, and bring his own mood to suit it. He knows that his own is sure to come ; and nature is fond of the practice. Hence it came to pass that I, after easing my mother's fears, and seeing a little to business, returned (as if drawn by a polar needle) to the death-bed of Sir Ensor.

There was some little confusion, people wanting to get away, and people trying to come in, from downright curiosity (of all things the most hateful), and others making great todo, and talking of their own time to come, telling their own age, and so on. But every one seemed to think, or feel, that I had a right to be there ; because the women took that view of it. As for Carver and Counsellor, they were minding their own affairs, so as to win the succession ; and never found it in their business (at least so long as I was there) to come near the dying man.

He, for his part, never asked for any one to come near him, not even a priest, nor a monk or friar ; but seemed to be going his own way, peaceful, and well-contented. Only the chief of the women said, that from his face she believed and knew, that he liked to have me at one side of his bed, and Lorna upon the other. An hour or two ere the old man died, when only we two were with him, he looked at us both very dimly and softly, as if he wished to do something for us, but had left it now too late. Lorna hoped that he wanted to bless us ; but he only frowned at that, and let his hand drop downward, and crooked one knotted finger.

“ He wants something out of the bed, dear,” Lorna

whispered to me ; “ see what it is, upon your side, there.”

I followed the bent of his poor shrunken hand, and sought among the pilings ; and there I felt something hard and sharp, and drew it forth and gave it to him. It flashed, like the spray of a fountain upon us, in the dark winter of the room. He could not take it in his hand, but let it hang, as daisies do ; only making Lorna see that he meant her to have it.

“ Why, it is my glass necklace ! ” Lorna cried, in great surprise ; “ my necklace he always promised me ; and from which you have got the ring, John. But grandfather kept it, because the children wanted to pull it from my neck. May I have it now, dear grandfather ? Not, unless you wish, dear.”

Darling Lorna wept again, because the old man could not tell her (except by one very feeble nod) that she was doing what he wished. Then she gave to me the trinket, for the sake of safety ; and I stowed it in my breast. He seemed to me to follow this, and to be well-content with it.

Before Sir Ensor Doone was buried, the greatest frost of the century had set in, with its iron hand, and step of stone, on everything. How it came is not my business, nor can I explain it ; because I never have watched the skies ; as people now begin to do, when the ground is not to their liking. Though of all this I know nothing, and less than nothing I may say (because I ought to know something) ; I can hear what people tell me ; and I can see before my eyes.

The strong men broke three good pickaxes, ere they got through the hard brown sod, streaked with little maps of grey, where old Sir Ensor was to lie, upon his back, awaiting the darkness of the Judgment-day. It was in the little chapel-yard ; I will not tell the name of it ; because we are now such Protestants, that I might do it an evil turn ; only it was the little place where Lorna's Aunt Sabina lay.

Here was I, remaining long, with a little curiosity ; because some people told me plainly that I must be damned for ever by a Papist funeral ; and here came Lorna, scarcely breathing through the thick of stuff around her, yet with all her little breath steaming on the air, like frost.

I stood apart from the ceremony, in which of course I was not entitled, either by birth or religion, to bear any portion : and indeed it would have been wiser in me to have kept away altogether ; for now there was no one to protect me among those wild and lawless men ; and both Carver and the Counsellor had vowed a fearful vengeance on me, as I heard from Gwenny. They had not dared to meddle with me, while the chief lay dying ; nor was it in their policy, for a short time after that, to endanger their succession by an open breach with Lorna, whose tender age and beauty held so many of the youths in thrall.

The ancient outlaw's funeral was a grand and moving sight ; more perhaps from the sense of contrast, than from that of fitness. To see those dark and mighty men, inured to all of sin and crime, reckless both of

man and God, yet now with heads devoutly bent, clasped hands, and downcast eyes, following the long black coffin of their common ancestor, to the place where they must join him when their sum of ill was done. And to see the feeble priest chanting, over the dead form, words the living would have laughed at, sprinkling with his little broom drops that could not purify ; while the children, robed in white, swung their smoking censers slowly, over the cold and twilight grave : and after seeing all, to ask, with a shudder unexpressed—“is this the end that God intended for a man so proud and strong ?”

Not a tear was shed upon him, except from the sweetest of all sweet eyes ; not a sigh pursued him home. Except in hot anger, his life had been cold, and bitter, and distant ; and now a week had exhausted all the sorrow of those around him, a grief flowing less from affection than fear. Aged men will show his tombstone ; mothers haste with their infants by it ; children shrink from the name upon it ; until in time his history shall lapse and be forgotten, by all except the great Judge and God.

After all was over, I strode across the moors very sadly ; trying to keep the cold away, by virtue of quick movement. Not a flake of snow had fallen yet ; all the earth was caked and hard, with a dry brown crust upon it ; all the sky was banked with darkness, hard, austere, and frowning. The fog of the last three weeks was gone, neither did any rime remain ; but all things had a look of sameness, and a kind of furzy colour. It

was freezing hard and sharp, with a piercing wind to back it; and I had observed that the holy water froze upon Sir Ensor's coffin.

One thing struck me with some surprise, as I made off for our fireside (with a strong determination, to heave an ash-tree up the chimney-place), and that was how the birds were going, rather than flying as they used to fly. All the birds were set in one direction, steadily journeying westward, not with any heat of speed, neither flying far at once; but all (as if on business bound), partly running, partly flying, partly fluttering along; silently, and without a voice, neither pricking head nor tail. This movement of the birds went on, even for a week or more; every kind of thrushes passed us, every kind of wild fowl, even plovers went away, and crows, and snipes and wood-cocks. And before half the frost was over, all we had in the snowy ditches were hares so tame that we could pat them; partridges that came to hand, with a dry noise in their crops; heath-poults, making cups of snow; and a few poor hopping redwings, flipping in and out the hedge, having lost the power to fly. And all the time their great black eyes, set with gold around them, seemed to look at any man, for mercy and for comfort.

Annie took a many of them, all that she could find herself, and all the boys would bring her; and she made a great hutch near the fire, in the back-kitchen chimney-place. Here, in spite of our old Betty (who sadly wanted to roast them), Annie kept some fifty birds, with bread and milk, and raw chopped meat, and

all the seed she could think of, and lumps of rotten apples, placed, to tempt them, in the corners. Some got on, and some died off; and Annie cried for all that died, and buried them under the woodrick: but, I do assure you, it was a pretty thing to see, when she went to them in the morning. There was not a bird but knew her well, after one day of comforting; and some would come to her hand, and sit, and shut one eye, and look at her. Then she used to stroke their heads, and feel their breasts, and talk to them; and not a bird of them all was there but liked to have it done to him. And I do believe they would eat from her hand things unnatural to them, lest she should be grieved and hurt by not knowing what to do for them. One of them was a noble bird, such as I never had seen before, of very fine bright plumage, and larger than a missel-thrush. He was the hardest of all to please; and yet he tried to do his best. I have heard since then, from a man who knows all about birds, and beasts, and fishes, that he must have been a Norwegian bird, called in this country a "Roller," who never comes to England but in the most tremendous winters.

Another little bird there was, whom I longed to welcome home, and protect from enemies, a little bird no native to us, but than any native dearer. But lo, in the very night which followed old Sir Ensor's funeral, such a storm of snow began as never have I heard nor read of, neither could have dreamed it. At what time of the night it first began is more than I can say, at least from my own knowledge, for we all went to bed soon after

supper, being cold and not inclined to talk. At that time the wind was moaning sadly, and the sky as dark as a wood, and the straw in the yard swirling round and round, and the cows huddling into the great cowhouse, with their chins upon one another. But we, being blinder than they, I suppose, and not having had a great snow for years, made no preparation against the storm, except that the lambing ewes were in shelter.

It struck me, as I lay in bed, that we were acting foolishly ; for an ancient shepherd had dropped in and taken supper with us, and foretold a heavy fall and great disaster to live stock. He said that he had known a frost beginning, just as this had done, with a black east wind, after days of raw cold fog, and then on the third night of the frost, at this very time of year (to wit on the 15th of December) such a snow set in as killed half of the sheep, and many even of the red deer and the forest ponies. It was three-score years agone,* he said ; and cause he had to remember it, inasmuch as two of his toes had been lost by frost-nip, while he dug out his sheep on the other side of the Dunkery. Hereupon mother nodded at him, having heard from her father about it, and how three men had been frozen to death, and how badly their stockings came off from them.

Remembering how the old man looked, and his manner of listening to the wind and shaking his head very ominously (when Annie gave him a glass of schnapps), I grew quite uneasy in my bed, as the room got colder and colder ; and I made up my mind, if it

* The frost of 1625.

only pleased God not to send the snow till the morning, that every sheep, and horse, and cow, ay and even the poultry, should be brought in snug, and with plenty to eat, and fodder enough to roast them.

Alas, what use of man's resolves, when they come a day too late ; even if they may avail a little, when they are most punctual !

In the bitter morning, I arose, to follow out my purpose, knowing the time from the force of habit, although the room was so dark and grey. An odd white light was on the rafters, such as I never had seen before ; while all the length of the room was grisly, like the heart of a mouldy oat-rick. I went to the window, at once, of course ; and at first I could not understand what was doing outside of it. It faced due east (as I may have said), with the walnut-tree partly sheltering it ; and generally I could see the yard, and the woodrick, and even the church beyond.

But now, half the lattice was quite blocked up, as if plastered with grey lime ; and little fringes, like ferns, came through, where the joining of the lead was ; and in the only undarkened part, countless dots came swarming, clustering, beating with a soft low sound, then gliding down in a slippery manner, not as drops of rain do, but each distinct from his neighbour. Inside the iron frame (which fitted, not to say too comfortably, and went along the stonework), at least a peck of snow had entered, following its own bend and fancy ; light as any cobweb.

With some trouble, and great care, lest the ancient

frame should yield, I spread the lattice open ; and saw at once that not a moment must be lost, to save our stock. All the earth was flat with snow, all the air was thick with snow ; more than this no man could see, for all the world was snowing.

I shut the window and dressed in haste ; and when I entered the kitchen, not even Betty, the earliest of all early birds, was there. I raked the ashes together a little, just to see a spark of warmth ; and then set forth to find John Fry, Jem Slocombe, and Bill Dadds. But this was easier thought than done ; for when I opened the court-yard door, I was taken up to my knees at once, and the power of the drifting cloud prevented sight of anything. However, I found my way to the woodrick, and there got hold of a fine ash-stake, cut by myself not long ago. With this I ploughed along pretty well, and thundered so hard at John Fry's door, that he thought it was the Doones at least, and cocked his blunderbuss out of the window.

John was very loth to come down, when he saw the meaning of it ; for he valued his life more than anything else, though he tried to make out that his wife was to blame. But I settled his doubts by telling him, that I would have him on my shoulder naked, unless he came in five minutes ; not that he could do much good, but because the other men would be sure to skulk, if he set them the example. With spades, and shovels, and pitchforks, and a round of roping, we four set forth to dig out the sheep ; and the poor things knew that it was high time.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT must have snowed, most wonderfully, to have made that depth of covering in about eight hours. For one of Master Stickles' men, who had been out all the night, said that no snow began to fall until nearly midnight. And here it was, blocking up the doors, stopping the ways, and the watercourses, and making it very much worse to walk than in a sawpit newly used. However we trudged along in a line ; I first, and the other men after me ; trying to keep my track, but finding legs and strength not up to it. Most of all, John Fry was groaning ; certain that his time was come, and sending messages to his wife, and blessings to his children. For all this time it was snowing harder than it ever had snowed before, so far as a man might guess at it ; and the leaden depth of the sky came down, like a mine turned upside down on us. Not that the flakes were so very large ; for I have seen much larger flakes in a shower of March, while sowing peas ; but that there was no room between them, neither any relaxing, nor any change of direction.

Watch, like a good and faithful dog, followed us very cheerfully, leaping out of the depth, which took him over his back and ears already, even in the level places ; while in the drifts he might have sunk to any distance out of sight, and never found his way up again. However we helped him now and then, especially through the gaps and gateways ; and so after a deal of floundering, some laughter, and a little swearing, we came all safe to the lower meadow, where most of our flock was hurdled.

But behold, there was no flock at all ! None, I mean, to be seen anywhere ; only at one corner of the field, by the eastern end, where the snow drove in, a great white billow, as high as a barn and as broad as a house. This great drift was rolling and curling beneath the violent blast, tufting and combing with rustling twirls, and carved (as in patterns of cornice) where the grooving chisel of the wind swept round. Ever and again, the tempest snatched little whiffs from the channelled edges, twirled them round and made them dance over the chine of the monster pile, then let them lie like herring-bones, or the seams of sand where the tide has been. And all the while from the smothering sky, more and more fiercely at every blast, came the pelting pitiless arrows, winged with murky white, and pointed with the barbs of frost.

But although, for people who had no sheep, the sight was a very fine one (so far at least as the weather permitted any sight at all) ; yet for us, with our flock beneath it, this great mount had but little charm.

Watch began to scratch at once, and to howl along the sides of it ; he knew that his charge was buried there, and his business taken from him. But we four men set to in earnest, digging with all our might and main, shovelling away at the great white pile, and fetching it into the meadow. Each man made for himself a cave, scooping at the soft cold flux, which slid upon him at every stroke, and throwing it out behind him, in piles of castled fancy. At last we drove our tunnels in (for we worked indeed for the lives of us), and all converging towards the middle, held our tools and listened.

The other men heard nothing at all ; or declared that they heard nothing, being anxious now to abandon the matter, because of the chill in their feet and knees. But I said, “ Go, if you choose, all of you. I will work it out by myself, you pie-crusts : ” and upon that they gripped their shovels, being more or less of Englishmen ; and the least drop of English blood is worth the best of any other, when it comes to lasting out.

But before we began again, I laid my head well into the chamber ; and there I heard a faint “ ma-a-ah, ” coming through some ells of snow, like a plaintive buried hope, or a last appeal. I shouted aloud to cheer him up, for I knew what sheep it was, to wit the most valiant of all the wethers, who had met me when I came home from London, and been so glad to see me. And then we all fell to again ; and very soon we hauled him out. Watch took charge of him at once,

with an air of the noblest patronage, lying on his frozen fleece, and licking all his face and feet, to restore his warmth to him. Then fighting Tom jumped up at once, and made a little butt at Watch, as if nothing had ever ailed him, and then set off to a shallow place, and looked for something to nibble at.

Further in, and close under the bank, where they had huddled themselves for warmth, we found all the rest of the poor sheep packed, as closely as if they were in a great pie. It was strange to observe how their vapour, and breath, and the moisture exuding from their wool had scooped, as it were, a coved room for them, lined with a ribbing of deep yellow snow. Also the churned snow beneath their feet was as yellow as gamboge. Two or three of the weaklier hoggets were dead, from want of air, and from pressure ; but more than three-score were as lively as ever ; though cramped and stiff for a little while.

“However shall us get ‘em home ?” John Fry asked in great dismay, when we had cleared about a dozen of them ; which we were forced to do very carefully, so as not to fetch the roof down. “No manner of maning to draive ‘un, drough all they girt driftesses.”

“You see to this place, John,” I replied, as we leaned on our shovels a moment, and the sheep came rubbing round us : “let no more of them out for the present ; they are better where they be. Watch, here boy, keep them !”

Watch came, with his little scut of a tail cocked as

sharp as duty ; and I set him at the narrow mouth of the great snow antre. All the sheep sidled away, and got closer, that the other sheep might be bitten first, as the foolish things imagine : whereas no good sheep-dog even so much as lips a sheep to turn it.

Then of the outer sheep (all now snowed and frizzled like a lawyer's wig) I took the two finest and heaviest, and with one beneath my right arm, and the other beneath my left, I went straight home to the upper sheppey, and set them inside, and fastened them. Sixty and six I took home in that way, two at a time on each journey ; and the work grew harder and harder each time, as the drifts of the snow were deepening. No other man should meddle with them : I was resolved to try my strength against the strength of the elements ; and try it I did, ay and proved it. A certain fierce delight burned in me, as the struggle grew harder ; but rather would I die than yield ; and at last I finished it. People talk of it to this day : but none can tell what the labour was, who have not felt that snow and wind.

Of the sheep upon the mountain, and the sheep upon the western farm, and the cattle on the upper barrows, scarcely one in ten was saved ; do what we would for them. And this was not through any neglect (now that our wits were sharpened), but from the pure impossibility of finding them at all. That great snow never ceased a moment for three days and nights ; and then when all the earth was filled, and the topmost hedges were unseen, and the trees broke down with

weight (wherever the wind had not lightened them), a brilliant sun broke forth and showed the loss of all our customs.

All our house was quite snowed up, except where we had purged a way, by dint of constant shovel-lings. The kitchen was as dark and darker than the cider-cellars, and long lines of furrowed scollops ran even up to the chimney-stacks. Several windows fell right inwards, through the weight of the snow against them ; and the few that stood bulged in, and bent like an old bruised lantern. We were obliged to cook by candle-light ; we were forced to read by candle-light ; as for baking, we could not do it, because the oven was too chill ; and a load of faggots only brought a little wet down the sides of it.

For when the sun burst forth at last upon that world of white, what he brought was neither warmth, nor cheer, nor hope of softening ; only a clearer shaft of cold, from the violet depths of sky. Long-drawn alleys of white haze seemed to lead towards him, yet such as he could not come down, with any warmth remaining. Broad white curtains of the frost-fog looped around the lower sky, on the verge of hill and valley, and above the laden trees. Only round the sun himself, and the spot of heaven he claimed, clustered a bright purple-blue, clear, and calm, and deep.

That night, such a frost ensued as we had never dreamed of, neither read in ancient books, or histories of Frobisher. The kettle by the fire froze, and the

crock upon the hearth-cheeks ; many men were killed, and cattle rigid in their head-ropes. Then I heard that fearful sound, which never I had heard before, neither since have heard (except during that same winter), the sharp yet solemn sound of trees burst open by the frost-blow. Our great walnut lost three branches, and has been dying ever since ; though growing meanwhile, as the soul does. And the ancient oak at the cross was rent, and many score of ash-trees. But why should I tell all this ? the people who have not seen it (as I have) will only make faces, and disbelieve ; till such another frost comes ; which perhaps may never be.

This terrible weather kept Tom Faggus from coming near our house for weeks ; at which indeed I was not vexed a quarter so much as Annie was ; for I had never half approved of him, as a husband for my sister ; in spite of his purchase from Squire Bassett, and the grant of the Royal pardon. It may be however that Annie took the same view of my love for Lorna, and could not augur well of it ; but if so, she held her peace, though I was not so sparing. For many things contributed to make me less good-humoured now than my real nature was ; and the very least of all these things would have been enough to make some people cross, and rude, and fractious. I mean the red and painful chapping of my face and hands, from working in the snow all day, and lying in the frost all night. For being of a fair complexion, and a ruddy nature, and pretty plump withal, and fed

on plenty of hot victuals, and always forced by my mother to sit nearer the fire than I wished, it was wonderful to see how the cold ran revel on my cheeks and knuckles. And I feared that Lorna (if it should ever please God to stop the snowing) might take this for a proof of low and rustic blood and breeding.

And this I say was the smallest thing; for it was far more serious that we were losing half our stock, do all we would to shelter them. Even the horses in the stables (mustered altogether, for the sake of breath and steaming) had long icicles from their muzzles, almost every morning. But of all things the very gravest, to my apprehension, was the impossibility of hearing, or having any token, of or from my loved one. Not that those three days alone of snow (tremendous as it was) could have blocked the country so; but that the sky had never ceased, for more than two days at a time, for full three weeks thereafter, to pour fresh piles of fleecy mantle; neither had the wind relaxed a single day from shaking them. As a rule, it snowed all day, cleared up at night, and froze intensely, with the stars as bright as jewels, earth spread out in lustrous twilight, and the sounds in the air as sharp, and crackling, as artillery: then in the morning snow again, before the sun could come to help.

It mattered not what way the wind was. Often and often the vanes went round, and we hoped for change of weather: the only change was that it seemed (if possible) to grow colder. Indeed, after a week or so, the wind would regularly box the compass (as the

sailors call it) in the course of every day, following where the sun should be, as if to make a mock of him. And this of course immensely added to the peril of the drifts ; because they shifted every day ; and no skill or care might learn them.

I believe it was on Epiphany morning, or somewhere about that period, when Lizzie ran into the kitchen to me, where I was thawing my goose-grease, with the dogs among the ashes—the live dogs, I mean, not the iron ones, for them we had given up long ago,—and having caught me, by way of wonder (for generally I was out shovelling, long before my “young lady” had her nightcap off), she positively kissed me, for the sake of warming her lips perhaps, or because she had something proud to say.

“ You great fool, John,” said my lady, as Annie and I used to call her, on account of her airs and graces ; “ what a pity you never read, John ! ”

“ Much use, I should think, in reading ! ” I answered, though pleased with her condescension ; “ read, I suppose, with roof coming in, and only this chimney left sticking out of the snow ! ”

“ The very time to read, John,” said Lizzie, looking grander : “ our worst troubles are the need, whence knowledge can deliver us.”

“ Amen,” I cried out ; “ are you parson or clerk ? Whichever you are, good morning.”

Thereupon I was bent on my usual round (a very small one nowadays), but Eliza took me with both hands, and I stopped of course ; for I could not bear to

shake the child, even in play, for a moment, because her back was tender. Then she looked up at me with her beautiful eyes, so large, unhealthy, and delicate, and strangely shadowing outward, as if to spread their meaning ; and she said,

“Now, John, this is no time to joke. I was almost frozen in bed last night ; and Annie like an icicle. Feel how cold my hands are. Now, will you listen to what I have read about climates, ten times worse than this ; and where none but clever men can live ?”

“Impossible for me to listen now. I have hundreds of things to see to : but I will listen after breakfast to your foreign climates, child. Now attend to mother’s hot coffee.”

She looked a little disappointed ; but she knew what I had to do : and after all she was not so utterly unreasonable ; although she did read books. And when I had done my morning’s work, I listened to her patiently ; and it was out of my power to think that all she said was foolish.

For I knew common sense pretty well, by this time, whether it happened to be my own, or any other person’s ; if clearly laid before me. And Lizzie had a particular way of setting forth very clearly whatever she wished to express and enforce. But the queerest part of it all was this, that if she could but have dreamed for a moment, what would be the first application made by me of her lesson, she would rather have bitten her tongue off than help me to my purpose.

She told me that in the “Arctic regions,” as they

call some places a long way north, where the Great Bear lies all across the heavens, and no sun is up, for whole months at a time, and yet where people will go exploring, out of pure contradiction, and for the sake of novelty, and love of being frozen,—that here they always had such winters as we were having now. It never ceased to freeze, she said ; and it never ceased to snow ; except when it was too cold ; and then, all the air was choked with glittering spikes, and a man's skin might come off of him, before he could ask the reason. Nevertheless the people there (although the snow was fifty feet deep, and all their breath fell behind them frozen, like a log of wood dropped from their shoulders), yet they managed to get along, and make the time of the year to each other, by a little cleverness. For seeing how the snow was spread, lightly over everything, covering up the hills and valleys, and the foreskin of the sea, they contrived a way to crown it, and to glide like a flake along. Through the sparkle of the whiteness, and the wreaths of windy tossings, and the ups and downs of cold, any man might get along with a boat on either foot, to prevent his sinking.

She told me how these boats were made ; very strong and very light, of ribs with skin across them ; five feet long, and one foot wide ; and turned up at each end, even as a canoe is. But she did not tell me, nor did I give it a moment's thought myself, how hard it was to walk upon them without early practice. Then she told me another thing, equally useful to me ; although I

would not let her see how much I thought about it. And this concerned the use of sledges, and their power of gliding, and the lightness of their following ; all of which I could see at once, through knowledge of our own farm-sledds ; which we employ in lieu of wheels, used in flatter districts. When I had heard all this from her, a mere chit of a girl as she was, unfit to make a snowball even, or to fry snow-pancakes, I looked down on her with amazement, and began to wish a little that I had given more time to books.

But God shapes all our fitness, and gives each man his meaning, even as he guides the wavering lines of snow descending. Our Eliza was meant for books ; our dear Annie for loving and cooking ; I, John Ridd, for sheep, and wrestling, and the thought of Lorna ; and mother to love all three of us, and to make the best of her children. And now, if I must tell the truth, as at every page I try to do (though God knows it is hard enough), I had felt through all this weather, though my life was Lorna's, something of a satisfaction in so doing duty to my kindest and best of mothers, and to none but her. For (if you come to think of it) a man's young love is very pleasant, very sweet, and tickling ; and takes him through the core of heart ; without his knowing how or why. Then he dwells upon it sideways, without people looking, and builds up all sorts of fancies, growing hot with working so at his own imaginings. So his love is a crystal Goddess, set upon an obelisk ; and whoever will not bow the knee (yet without glancing at her), the lover makes it a

sacred rite either to kick or to stick him. I am not speaking of me and Lorna, but of common people.

Then (if you come to think again) lo—or I will not say lo! for no one can behold it—only feel, or but remember, what a real mother is. Ever loving, ever soft, ever turning sin to goodness, vices into virtues; blind to all nine-tenths of wrong; through a telescope beholding (though herself so nigh to them) faintest decimal of promise, even in her vilest child. Ready to thank God again, as when her babe was born to her; leaping (as at kingdom-come) at a wandering syllable of Gospel for her lost one.

All this our mother was to us, and even more than all of this; and hence I felt a pride and joy in doing my sacred duty towards her, now that the weather compelled me. And she was as grateful and delighted, as if she had no more claim upon me than a stranger's sheep might have. Yet from time to time I groaned within myself and by myself, at thinking of my sad debarment from the sight of Lorna, and of all that might have happened to her, now she had no protection.

Therefore I fell to at once, upon that hint from Lizzie, and being used to thatching-work, and the making of traps, and so on, before very long I built myself a pair of strong and light snow-shoes, framed with ash and ribbed of withy, with half-tanned calf-skin stretched across, and an inner sole to support my feet. At first I could not walk at all, but floundered about most piteously, catching one shoe in the other, and both

of them in the snow-drifts, to the great amusement of the girls, who were come to look at me. But after a while I grew more expert, discovering what my errors were, and altering the inclination of the shoes themselves, according to a print which Lizzie found in a book of adventures. And this made such a difference, that I crossed the farmyard and came back again (though turning was the worst thing of all) without so much as falling once, or getting my staff entangled.

But oh the aching of my ankles, when I went to bed that night! I was forced to help myself upstairs with a couple of mopsticks; and I rubbed the joints with neatsfoot oil, which comforted them greatly. And likely enough I would have abandoned any further trial, but for Lizzie's ridicule, and pretended sympathy; asking if the strong John Ridd would have old Betty to lean upon. Therefore I set to again, with a fixed resolve not to notice pain or stiffness, but to warm them out of me. And sure enough, before dark that day, I could get along pretty freely: especially improving every time, after leaving off and resting. The astonishment of poor John Fry, Bill Dadds, and Jem Slocombe, when they saw me coming down the hill upon them, in the twilight, where they were clearing the furze-rick and trussing it for cattle, was more than I can tell you; because they did not let me see it, but ran away with one accord, and floundered into a snow-drift. They believed, and so did every one else (especially when I grew able to glide along pretty rapidly), that I had stolen Mother Melldrum's sieves,

on which she was said to fly over the foreland at midnight every Saturday.

Upon the following day, I held some council with my mother ; not liking to go without her permission, yet scarcely daring to ask for it. But here she disappointed me, on the right side of disappointment ; saying that she had seen my pining (which she never could have done ; because I had been too hard at work), and rather than watch me grieving so, for somebody or other, who now was all in all to me, I might go upon my course, and God's protection go with me ! At this I was amazed, because it was not at all like mother ; and knowing how well I had behaved, ever since the time of our snowing up, I was a little moved to tell her that she could not understand me. However my sense of duty kept me, and my knowledge of the catechism, from saying such a thing as that, or even thinking twice of it. And so I took her at her word, which she was not prepared for ; and telling her how proud I was of her trust in Providence, and how I could run in my new snow-shoes, I took a short pipe in my mouth, and started forth accordingly.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN I started on my road across the hills and valleys (which now were pretty much alike) the utmost I could hope to do, was to gain the crest of hills, and look into the Doone Glen. Hence I might at least descry whether Lorna still was safe, by the six nests still remaining, and the view of the Captain's house. When I was come to the open country, far beyond the sheltered homestead, and in the full brunt of the wind, the keen blast of the cold broke on me, and the mighty breadth of snow. Moor and highland, field and common, cliff and vale, and watercourse; over all the rolling folds of misty white were flung. There was nothing square or jagged left, there was nothing perpendicular; all the rugged lines were eased, and all the breaches smoothly filled. Curves, and mounds, and rounded heavings took the place of rock and stump; and all the country looked as if a woman's hand had been on it.

Through the sparkling breadth of white, which seemed to glance my eyes away; and outside the

humps of laden trees, bowing their backs like a woodman ; I contrived to get along, half sliding and half walking, in places where a plain-shodden man must have sunk, and waited freezing, till the thaw should come to him. For although there had been such violent frost, every night, upon the snow ; the snow itself, having never thawed, even for an hour, had never coated over. Hence it was as soft and light as if all had fallen yesterday. In places where no drift had been, but rather off than on to them, three feet was the least of depth : but where the wind had chased it round, or any draught led like a funnel, or anything opposed it ; there you might very safely say that it ran up to twenty feet, or thirty, or even fifty, and I believe sometimes a hundred.

At last I got to my spy-hill (as I had begun to call it), although I never should have known it, but for what it looked on. And even to know this last again required all the eyes of love, soever sharp and vigilant. For all the beautiful Glen Doone (shaped from out the mountains, as if on purpose for the Doones, and looking in the summer-time like a sharp-cut vase of green) now was besnowed half up the sides, and at either end so, that it was more like the white basins wherein we boil plum-puddings. Not a patch of grass was there, not a black branch of a tree ; all was white ; and the little river flowed beneath an arch of snow ; if it managed to flow at all.

Now this was a great surprise to me ; not only because I believed Glen Doone to be a place outside

all frost, but also because I thought perhaps that it was quite impossible to be cold near Lorna. And now it struck me all at once that perhaps her ewer was frozen (as mine had been for the last three weeks, requiring embers around it), and perhaps her window would not shut, any more than mine would; and perhaps she wanted blankets. This idea worked me up to such a chill of sympathy, that seeing no Doones now about, and doubting if any guns would go off, in this state of the weather, and knowing that no man could catch me up (except with shoes like mine), I even resolved to slide the cliffs, and bravely go to Lorna.

It helped me much in this resolve, that the snow came on again, thick enough to blind a man who had not spent his time among it, as I had done now for days and days. Therefore I took my neatsfoot oil, which now was clogged like honey, and rubbed it hard into my leg-joints, so far as I could reach them. And then I set my back and elbows well against a snow-drift, hanging far adown the cliff, and saying some of the Lord's Prayer, threw myself on Providence. Before there was time to think or dream, I landed very beautifully upon a ridge of run-up snow in a quiet corner. My good shoes, or boots, preserved me from going far beneath it; though one of them was sadly strained, where a grub had gnawed the ash, in the early summer-time. Having set myself aright, and being in good spirits, I made boldly across the valley (where the snow was furrowed hard), being now afraid of nobody.

If Lorna had looked out of the window, she would not have known me, with those boots upon my feet, and a well-cleaned sheepskin over me, bearing my own (J. R.) in red, just between my shoulders, but covered now in snow-flakes. The house was partly drifted up, though not so much as ours was; and I crossed the little stream almost without knowing that it was under me. At first, being pretty safe against interference from the other huts, by virtue of the blinding snow and the difficulty of walking, I examined all the windows; but these were coated so with ice, like ferns and flowers and dazzling stars, that no one could so much as guess what might be inside of them. Moreover I was afraid of prying narrowly into them, as it was not a proper thing where a maiden might be: only I wanted to know just this, whether she were there or not.

Taking nothing by this movement, I was forced, much against my will, to venture to the door and knock, in a hesitating manner, not being sure but what my answer might be the mouth of a carbine. However it was not so, for I heard a pattering of feet and a whispering going on, and then a shrill voice through the keyhole, asking "Who's there?"

"Only me, John Ridd," I answered; upon which I heard a little laughter, and a little sobbing, or something that was like it; and then the door was opened about a couple of inches, with a bar behind it still; and then the little voice went on—

"Put thy finger in, young man, with the old ring on

it. But mind thee, if it be the wrong one, thou shalt never draw it back again."

Laughing at Gwenny's mighty threat, I showed my finger in the opening: upon which she let me in, and barred the door again like lightning.

"What is the meaning of all this, Gwenny?" I asked, as I slipped about on the floor, for I could not stand there firmly with my great snow-shoes on.

"Maning enough, and bad maning too," the Cornish girl made answer. "Us be shut in here, and starving, and durstn't let anybody in upon us. I wish thou wer't good to ate, young man: I could manage most of thee."

I was so frightened by her eyes, full of wolfish hunger, that I could only say "Good God!" having never seen the like before. Then drew I forth a large piece of bread, which I had brought in case of accidents, and placed it in her hands. She leaped at it, as a starving dog leaps at sight of his supper, and she set her teeth in it, and then withheld it from her lips, with something very like an oath at her own vile greediness; and then away round the corner with it, no doubt for her young mistress. I meanwhile was occupied, to the best of my ability, in taking my snow-shoes off, yet wondering much within myself why Lorna did not come to me.

But presently I knew the cause, for Gwenny called me, and I ran, and found my darling quite unable to say so much as, "John, how are you?" Between the hunger, and the cold, and the excitement of my coming,

she had fainted away, and lay back on a chair, as white as the snow around us. In betwixt her delicate lips, Gwenny was thrusting with all her strength the hard brown crust of the rye-bread, which she had snatched from me so.

“Get water, or get snow,” I said ; “don’t you know what fainting is, you very stupid child ?”

“Never heered on it, in Carnwall,” she answered, trusting still to the bread: “be un the same as bleeding ?”

“It will be directly, if you go on squeezing away with that crust so. Eat a piece: I have got some more. Leave my darling now to me.”

Hearing that I had some more, the starving girl could resist no longer, but tore it in two, and had swallowed half, before I had coaxed my Lorna back to sense, and hope, and joy, and love.

“I never expected to see you again. I had made up my mind to die, John; and to die without your knowing it.”

As I repelled this fearful thought in a manner highly fortifying, the tender hue flowed back again into her famished cheeks and lips, and a softer brilliance glistened from the depth of her dark eyes. She gave me one little shrunken hand, and I could not help a tear for it.

“After all, Mistress Lorna,” I said, pretending to be gay, for a smile might do her good ; “you do not love me as Gwenny does ; for she even wanted to eat me.”

“And shall, afore I have done, young man,” Gwenny

answered, laughing: "you come in here with they red chakes, and make us think o' sirloin."

"Eat up your bit of brown bread, Gwenny. It is not good enough for your mistress. Bless her heart, I have something here such as she never tasted the like of, being in such appetite. Look here, Lorna; smell it first. I have had it ever since Twelfth-day, and kept it all the time for you. Annie made it. That is enough to warrant it good cooking."

And then I showed my great mince-pie in a bag of tissue-paper, and I told them how the mince-meat was made of golden pippins finely shred, with the undercut of the sirloin, and spice and fruit accordingly and far beyond my knowledge. But Lorna would not touch a morsel until she had thanked God for it, and given me the kindest kiss, and put a piece in Gwenny's mouth.

I have eaten many things myself, with very great enjoyment, and keen perception of their merits, and some thanks to God for them. But I never did enjoy a thing, that had found its way between my own lips, half or even a quarter as much, as I now enjoyed beholding Lorna, sitting proudly upwards (to show that she was faint no more) entering into that mince-pie, and moving all her pearls of teeth (inside her little mouth-place) exactly as I told her. For I was afraid lest she should be too fast in going through it, and cause herself more damage so, than she got of nourishment. But I had no need to fear at all, and Lorna could not help laughing at me for thinking that she had no self-controul.

Some creatures require a deal of food (I myself

among the number), and some can do with a very little ; making, no doubt, the best of it. And I have often noticed that the plumpest and most perfect women never eat so hard and fast as the skinny and three-corner'd ones. These last be often ashamed of it, and eat most when the men be absent. Hence it came to pass that Lorna, being the loveliest of all maidens, had as much as she could do to finish her own half of pie ; whereas Gwenny Carfax (though generous more than greedy) ate up hers without winking, after finishing the brown loaf ; and then I begged to know the meaning of this state of things.

“The meaning is sad enough,” said Lorna ; “and I see no way out of it. We are both to be starved until I let them do what they like with me.”

“That is to say, until you choose to marry Carver Doone, and be slowly killed by him.”

“Slowly ! No, John, quickly. I hate him so intensely, that less than a week would kill me.”

“Not a doubt of that,” said Gwenny : “oh, she hates him nicely then : but not half so much as I do.”

I told them both that this state of things could be endured no longer ; on which point they agreed with me, but saw no means to help it. For even if Lorna could make up her mind to come away with me and live at Plover’s Barrows farm, under my good mother’s care, as I had urged so often, behold the snow was all around us, heaped as high as mountains, and how could any delicate maiden ever get across it ?

Then I spoke, with a strange tingle upon both sides of

my heart, knowing that this undertaking was a serious one for all, and might burn our farm down.

“If I warrant to take you safe, and without much fright or hardship, Lorna, will you come with me?”

“To be sure I will, dear,” said my beauty with a smile, and a glance to follow it; “I have small alternative, to starve, or go with you, John.”

“Gwenny, have you courage for it? Will you come with your young mistress?”

“Will I stay behind?” cried Gwenny, in a voice that settled it. And so we began to arrange about it; and I was much excited. It was useless now to leave it longer: if it could be done at all, it could not be too quickly done. It was the Counsellor who had ordered, after all other schemes had failed, that his niece should have no food until she would obey him. He had strictly watched the house, taking turns with Carver, to ensure that none came nigh it bearing food or comfort. But this evening, they had thought it needless to remain on guard; and it would have been impossible, because themselves were busy offering high festival to all the valley, in right of their own commandery. And Gwenny said that nothing made her so nearly mad with appetite as the account she received from a woman of all the dishes preparing. Nevertheless she had answered bravely,

“Go and tell the Counsellor, and go and tell the Carver, who sent you to spy upon us, that we shall have a finer dish than any set before them.” And so in truth they did, although so little dreaming it;

for no Doone that was ever born, however much of a Carver, might vie with our Annie for mince-meat.

Now while we sate, reflecting much, and talking a good deal more, in spite of all the cold,—for I never was in a hurry to go, when I had Lorna with me,—she said, in her silvery voice, which always led me so along, as if I were slave to a beautiful bell,

“Now, John, we are wasting time, dear. You have praised my hair, till it curls with pride, and my eyes till you cannot see them, even if they are brown diamonds, which I have heard for the fiftieth time at least; though I never saw such a jewel. Don’t you think that it is high time to put on your snow-shoes, John?”

“Certainly not,” I answered; “till we have settled something more. I was so cold, when I came in; and now I am as warm as a cricket. And so are you, you lively soul; though you are not upon my hearth yet.”

“Remember, John,” said Lorna, nestling for a moment to me; “the severity of the weather makes a great difference between us. And you must never take advantage.”

“I quite understand all that, dear. And the harder it freezes the better, while that understanding continues. Now do try to be serious.”

“I try to be serious! And I have been trying fifty times, and could not bring you to it, John! Although I am sure the situation, as the Counsellor always says, at the beginning of a speech; the situation, to say the least, is serious enough for anything. Come, Gwenny, imitate him.”

Gwenny was famed for her imitation of the Counsellor making a speech; and she began to shake her hair, and mount upon a foot-stool; but I really could not have this, though even Lorna ordered it. The truth was that my darling maiden was in such wild spirits, at seeing me so unexpected, and at the prospect of release, and of what she had never known, quiet life, and happiness, that like all warm and loving natures, she could scarce controul herself.

“Come to this frozen window, John, and see them light the stack-fire. They will little know who looks at them. Now be very good, John. You stay in that corner, dear, and I will stand on this side; and try to breathe yourself a peep-hole through the lovely spears and banners. Oh, you don’t know how to do it. I must do it for you. Breathe three times, like that, and that; and then you rub it with your fingers, before it has time to freeze again.”

All this she did so beautifully, with her lips put up like cherries, and her fingers bent half back, as only girls can bend them, and her little waist thrown out against the white of the snowed-up window, that I made her do it three times over; and I stopped her every time, and let it freeze again, that so she might be the longer. Now I knew that all her love was mine, every bit as much as mine was hers; yet I must have her to show it, dwelling upon every proof, lengthening out all certainty. Perhaps the jealous heart is loth to own a life worth twice its own. Be that as it may, I know that we thawed the window nicely.

And then I saw, far down the stream (or rather down the bed of it, for there was no stream visible) a little form of fire arising, red, and dark, and flickering. Presently it caught on something, and went upward boldly ; and then it struck into many forks, and then it fell, and rose again.

“Do you know what all that is, John ?” asked Lorna, smiling cleverly at the manner of my staring.

“How on earth should I know ? Papists burn Protestants in the flesh ; and Protestants burn Papists in effigy, as we mock them. Lorna, are they going to burn any one to-night ?”

“No, you dear. I must rid you of these things. I see that you are bigoted. The Doones are firing Dunkery beacon, to celebrate their new captain.”

“But how could they bring it here, through the snow ? If they have sledges, I can do nothing.”

“They brought it before the snow began. The moment poor grandfather was gone, even before his funeral, the young men, having none to check them, began at once upon it. They had always borne a grudge against it : not that it ever did them harm ; but because it seemed so insolent. ‘Can’t a gentleman go home, without a smoke behind him ?’ I have often heard them saying. And though they have done it no serious harm, since they threw the firemen on the fire, many many years ago ; they have often promised to bring it here for their candle ; and now they have done it. Ah, now look ! The tar is kindled.”

Though Lorna took it so in joke, I looked upon it

very gravely, knowing that this heavy outrage to the feelings of the neighbourhood would cause more stir than a hundred sheep stolen, or a score of houses sacked. Not of course that the beacon was of the smallest use to any one, neither stopped any body from stealing: nay, rather it was like the parish-knell, which begins when all is over, and depresses all the survivors; yet I knew that we valued it, and were proud, and spoke of it as a mighty institution; and even more than that, our vestry had voted, within the last two years, seven shillings and sixpence to pay for it, in proportion with other parishes. And one of the men who attended to it, or at least who was paid for doing so, was our Jem Slocombe's grandfather.

However, in spite of all my regrets, the fire went up very merrily, blazing red and white and yellow, as it leaped on different things. And the light danced on the snowdrifts with a misty lilac hue. I was astonished at its burning in such mighty depths of snow; but Gwenny said that the wicked men had been three days hard at work, clearing, as it were, a cock-pit, for their fire to have its way. And now they had a mighty pile, which must have covered five landyards square, heaped up to a goodly height, and eager to take fire.

In this I saw great obstacle to what I wished to manage. For when this pyramid should be kindled thoroughly, and pouring light and blazes round, would not all the valley be like a white room full of candles? Thinking thus, I was half inclined to abide my time for another night; and then my second

thoughts convinced me that I would be a fool in this. For lo, what an opportunity! All the Doones would be drunk of course, in about three hours' time, and getting more and more in drink, as the night went on. As for the fire, it must sink in about three hours or more, and only cast uncertain shadows, friendly to my purpose. And then the outlaws must cower round it, as the cold increased on them, helping the weight of the liquor; and in their jollity any noise would be cheered as a false alarm. Most of all, and which decided once for all my action,—when these wild and reckless villains should be hot with ardent spirits, what was door, or wall, to stand betwixt them and my Lorna?

This thought quickened me so much that I touched my darling reverently, and told her in a few short words how I hoped to manage it.

“Sweetest, in two hours' time, I shall be again with you. Keep the bar up, and have Gwenny ready to answer any one. You are safe while they are dining, dear, and drinking healths, and all that stuff: and before they have done with that, I shall be again with you. Have everything you care to take in a very little compass: and Gwenny must have no baggage. I shall knock loud, and then wait a little; and then knock twice, very softly.”

With this, I folded her in my arms; and she looked frightened at me; not having perceived her danger: and then I told Gwenny over again what I had told her mistress: but she only nodded her head and said, “Young man, go and teach thy grandmother.”

CHAPTER XVI.

To my great delight I found that the weather, not often friendly to lovers, and lately seeming so hostile, had in the most important matter done me a signal service. For when I had promised to take my love from the power of those wretches, the only way of escape apparent lay through the main Doone-gate. For though I might climb the cliffs myself, especially with the snow to aid me, I durst not try to fetch Lorna up them, even if she were not half-starved, as well as partly frozen; and as for Gwenny's door, as we called it (that is to say, the little entrance from the wooded hollow), it was snowed up long ago to the level of the hills around. Therefore, I was at my wit's end how to get them out; the passage by the Doone-gate being long, and dark, and difficult, and leading to such a weary circuit among the snowy moors and hills.

But now, being homeward-bound by the shortest possible track, I slipped along between the bonfire and the boundary cliffs, where I found a caved way of

snow behind a sort of avalanche : so that if the Doones had been keeping watch (which they were not doing, but revelling) they could scarcely have discovered me. And when I came to my old ascent, where I had often scaled the cliff and made across the mountains, it struck me that I would just have a look at my first and painful entrance, to wit, the waterslide. I never for a moment imagined that this could help me now ; for I never had dared to descend it, even in the finest weather ; still I had a curiosity to know what my old friend was like, with so much snow upon him. But, to my very great surprise, there was scarcely any snow there at all, though plenty curling high over head from the cliff, like bolsters over it. Probably the sweeping of the north-east wind up the narrow chasm had kept the showers from blocking it, although the water had no power under the bitter grip of frost. All my waterslide was now less a slide than path of ice ; furrowed where the waters ran over fluted ridges ; seamed where wind had tossed and combed them, even while congealing ; and crossed with little steps wherever the freezing torrent lingered. And here and there the ice was fibred with the trail of sludge-weed, slanting from the side, and matted, so as to make resting-place.

Lo it was easy track and channel, as if for the very purpose made, down which I could guide my sledge with Lorna sitting in it. There were only two things to be feared ; one lest the rolls of snow above should fall in and bury us ; the other lest we should rush too fast, and so be carried headlong into the black

whirlpool at the bottom, the middle of which was still unfrozen, and looking more horrible by the contrast. Against this danger I made provision, by fixing a stout bar across ; but of the other we must take our chance, and trust ourselves to Providence.

I hastened home at my utmost speed, and told my mother for God's sake to keep the house up till my return, and to have plenty of fire blazing, and plenty of water boiling, and food enough hot for a dozen people, and the best bed aired with the warming-pan. Dear mother smiled softly at my excitement, though her own was not much less, I am sure, and enhanced by sore anxiety. Then I gave very strict directions to Annie, and praised her a little, and kissed her ; and I even endeavoured to flatter Eliza, lest she should be disagreeable.

After this I took some brandy, both within and about me ; the former, because I had sharp work to do ; and the latter in fear of whatever might happen, in such great cold, to my comrades. Also I carried some other provisions, grieving much at their coldness ; and then I went to the upper linhay, and took our new light pony-sledd, which had been made almost as much for pleasure as for business ; though God only knows how our girls could have found any pleasure in bumping along so. On the snow however it ran as sweetly as if it had been made for it ; yet I durst not take the pony with it, in the first place because his hoofs would break through the ever-shifting surface of the light and piling snow ; and secondly because those ponies, coming

from the forest, have a dreadful trick of neighing, and most of all in frosty weather.

Therefore I girded my own body with a dozen turns of hay-rope, twisting both the ends in under at the bottom of my breast, and winding the hay on the skew a little, that the hempen thong might not slip between, and so cut me in the drawing. I put a good piece of spare rope in the sledd, and the cross-seat with the back to it, which was stuffed with our own wool, as well as two or three fur coats: and then just as I was starting, out came Annie, in spite of the cold, panting for fear of missing me, and with nothing on her head, but a lanthorn in one hand.

“Oh, John, here is the most wonderful thing! Mother has never shown it before; and I can’t think how she could make up her mind. She had gotten it in a great well of a cupboard, with camphor, and spirits, and lavender. Lizzie says it is a most magnificent sealskin cloak, worth fifty pounds, or a farthing.”

“At any rate, it is soft and warm,” said I, very calmly flinging it into the bottom of the sledd. “Tell mother I will put it over Lorna’s feet.”

“Lorna’s feet! Oh you great fool;” cried Annie, for the first time reviling me: “Over her shoulders; and be proud, you very stupid John.”

“It is not good enough for her feet;” I answered, with strong emphasis; “but don’t tell mother I said so, Annie. Only thank her very kindly.”

With that I drew my traces hard, and set my ashen staff into the snow, and struck out with my best foot

foremost (the best one at snow-shoes I mean), and the sledd came after me as lightly as a dog might follow ; and Annie, with the lanthorn, seemed to be left behind and waiting, like a pretty lamp-post.

The full moon rose as bright behind me as a patin of pure silver, casting on the snow long shadows of the few things left above, burdened rock, and shaggy foreland, and the labouring trees. In the great white desolation, distance was a mocking vision : hills looked nigh, and valleys far ; when hills were far and valleys nigh. And the misty breath of frost, piercing through the ribs of rock, striking to the pith of trees, creeping to the heart of man, lay along the hollow places, like a serpent sloughing. Even as my own gaunt shadow (travestied as if I were the moonlight's daddy-long-legs) went before me down the slope ; even I, the shadow's master, who had tried in vain to cough, when coughing brought good liquorice, felt a pressure on my bosom, and a husking in my throat.

However, I went on quietly, and at a very tidy speed ; being only too thankful that the snow had ceased, and no wind as yet arisen. And from the ring of low white vapour girding all the verge of sky, and from the rosy blue above, and the shafts of starlight set upon a quivering bow, as well as from the moon itself and the light behind it, having learned the signs of frost from its bitter twinges, I knew that we should have a night as keen as ever England felt. Nevertheless I had work enough to keep me warm if I managed it. The question was, could I contrive to save my darling from it ?

Daring not to risk my sledd by any fall from the valley-cliffs, I dragged it very carefully up the steep incline of ice, through the narrow chasm, and so to the very brink and verge, where first I had seen my Lorna, in the fishing-days of boyhood. As I then had a trident fork, for sticking of the loaches, so I now had a strong ash stake, to lay across from rock to rock, and break the speed of descending. With this I moored the sledd quite safe, at the very lip of the chasm, where all was now substantial ice, green and black in the moonlight ; and then I set off up the valley, skirting along one side of it.

The stack-fire still was burning strongly, but with more of heat than blaze ; and many of the younger Doones were playing on the verge of it, the children making rings of fire, and their mothers watching them. All the grave and reverend warriors, having heard of rheumatism, were inside of log and stone, in the two lowest houses, with enough of candles burning to make our list of sheep come short.

All these I passed, without the smallest risk or difficulty, walking up the channel of drift which I spoke of once before. And then I crossed, with more of care, and to the door of Lorna's house, and made the sign, and listened, after taking my snow-shoes off.

But no one came, as I expected, neither could I espy a light. And I seemed to hear a faint low sound, like the moaning of the snow-wind. Then I knocked again more loudly, with a knocking at my heart ; and receiving no answer, set all my power at once against

the door. In a moment it flew inwards, and I glided along the passage with my feet still slippery. There in Lorna's room I saw, by the moonlight flowing in, a sight which drove me beyond sense.

Lorna was behind a chair, crouching in the corner, with her hands up, and a crucifix, or something that looked like it. In the middle of the room, lay Gwenny Carfax, stupid, yet with one hand clutching the ankle of a struggling man. Another man stood above my Lorna, trying to draw the chair away. In a moment I had him round the waist, and he went out of the window with a mighty crash of glass ; luckily for him that window had no bars like some of them. Then I took the other man by the neck ; and he could not plead for mercy. I bore him out of the house as lightly as I would bear a baby, yet squeezing his throat a little more than I fain would do to an infant. By the bright moonlight I saw that I carried Marwood de Whichehalse. For his father's sake, I spared him, and because he had been my schoolfellow : but with every muscle of my body strung with indignation, I cast him, like a skittle, from me into a snowdrift, which closed over him. Then I looked for the other fellow, tossed through Lorna's window ; and found him lying stunned and bleeding, neither able to groan yet. Charleworth Doone, if his gushing blood did not much mislead me.

It was no time to linger now : I fastened my shoes, in a moment, and caught up my own darling with her head upon my shoulder, where she whispered faintly ; and telling Gwenny to follow me, or else I would come

back for her, if she could not walk the snow, I ran the whole distance to my sledd, caring not who might follow me. Then by the time I had set up Lorna, beautiful and smiling, with the sealskin cloak all over her, sturdy Gwenny came along, having trudged in the track of my snow-shoes, although with two bags on her back. I set her in beside her mistress, to support her, and keep warm; and then with one look back at the glen, which had been so long my home of heart, I hung behind the sledd, and launched it down the steep and dangerous way.

Though the cliffs were black above us, and the road unseen in front, and a great white grave of snow might at a single word come down, Lorna was as calm and happy as an infant in its bed. She knew that I was with her; and when I told her not to speak, she touched my hand in silence. Gwenny was in a much greater fright, having never seen such a thing before, neither knowing what it is to yield to pure love's confidence. I could hardly keep her quiet, without making a noise myself. With my staff from rock to rock, and my weight thrown backward, I broke the sledd's too rapid way, and brought my grown love safely out; by the selfsame road, which first had led me to her girlish fancy, and my boyish slavery.

Unpursued, yet looking back as if some one must be after us, we skirted round the black whirling pool, and gained the meadows beyond it. Here there was hard collar-work, the track being all uphill and rough; and Gwenny wanted to jump out, to lighten the sledd and

to push behind. But I would not hear of it ; because it was now so deadly cold, and I feared that Lorna might get frozen, without having Gwenny to keep her warm. And after all, it was the sweetest labour I had ever known in all my life, to be sure that I was pulling Lorna, and pulling her to our own farm-house.

Gwenny's nose was touched with frost, before we had gone much further, because she would not keep it quiet and snug beneath the sealskin. And here I had to stop in the moonlight (which was very dangerous) and rub it with a clove of snow, as Eliza had taught me ; and Gwenny scolding all the time, as if myself had frozen it. Lorna was now so far oppressed with all the troubles of the evening, and the joy that followed them, as well as by the piercing cold and difficulty of breathing, that she lay quite motionless, like fairest wax in the moonlight—when we stole a glance at her, beneath the dark folds of the cloak ; and I thought that she was falling into the heavy snow-sleep, whence there is no awaking.

Therefore I drew my traces tight, and set my whole strength to the business ; and we slipped along at a merry pace, although with many joltings, which must have sent my darling out into the cold snow-drifts, but for the short strong arm of Gwenny. And so in about an hour's time, in spite of many hindrances, we came home to the old courtyard, and all the dogs saluted us. My heart was quivering, and my cheeks as hot as the Boone's bonfire, with wondering both what Lorna would think of our farm-yard, and what my mother

would think of her. Upon the former subject my anxiety was wasted, for Lorna neither saw a thing, nor even opened her heavy eyes. And as to what mother would think of her ; she was certain not to think at all, until she had cried over her.

And so indeed it came to pass. Even at this length of time, I can hardly tell it, although so bright before my mind, because it moves my heart so. The sledd was at the open door, with only Lorna in it: for Gwenny Carfax had jumped out, and hung back in the clearing, giving any reason rather than the only true one—that she would not be intruding. At the door were all our people ; first of course Betty Mux-worthy, teaching me how to draw the sledd, as if she had been born in it, and flourishing with a great broom, wherever a speck of snow lay. Then dear Annie, and old Molly (who was very quiet, and counted almost for nobody), and behind them mother, looking as if she wanted to come first, but doubted how the manners lay. In the distance Lizzie stood, fearful of encouraging, but unable to keep out of it.

Betty was going to poke her broom right in under the sealskin cloak, where Lorna lay unconscious, and where her precious breath hung frozen, like a silver cobweb ; but I caught up Betty's broom, and flung it clean away over the corn-chamber ; and then I put the others by, and fetched my mother forward.

“ You shall see her first,” I said : “ is she not your daughter ? Hold the light there, Annie.”

Dear mother's hands were quick and trembling, as

she opened the shining folds ; and there she saw my Lorna sleeping, with her black hair all dishevelled, and she bent and kissed her forehead, and only said, “God bless her, John !” And then she was taken with violent weeping, and I was forced to hold her.

“Us may tich of her now, I rackon,” said Betty in her most jealous way : “Annie, tak her by the head, and I’ll tak her by the toesen. No taime to stand here like girt gawks. Don’ee tak on zo, missus. Ther be vainer vish in the zea—Lor but her be a booty !”

With this, they carried her into the house, Betty chattering all the while, and going on now about Lorna’s hands, and the others crowding round her, so that I thought I was not wanted among so many women, and should only get the worst of it, and perhaps do harm to my darling. Therefore I went and brought Gwenny in, and gave her a potful of bacon and peas, and an iron spoon to eat it with, which she did right heartily.

Then I asked her how she could have been such a fool as to let those two vile fellows enter the house where Lorna was ; and she accounted for it so naturally, that I could only blame myself. For my agreement had been to give one loud knock (if you happen to remember), and after that two little knocks. Well these two drunken rogues had come ; and one, being very drunk indeed, had given a great thump ; and then nothing more to do with it ; and the other, being

three-quarters drunk, had followed his leader (as one might say) but feebly, and making two of it. Whereupon up jumped Lorna, and declared that her John was there.

All this Gwenny told me shortly, between the whiles of eating, and even while she licked the spoon: and then there came a message for me that my love was sensible, and was seeking all around for me. Then I told Gwenny to hold her tongue (whatever she did, among us) and not to trust to women's words; and she told me they all were liars, as she had found out long ago; and the only thing to believe in was an honest man, when found. Thereupon I could have kissed her, as a sort of tribute, liking to be appreciated; yet the peas upon her lips made me think about it; and thought is fatal to action. So I went to see my dear.

That sight I shall not forget; till my dying head falls back, and my breast can lift no more. I know not whether I were then more blessed, or harrowed by it. For in the settle was my Lorna, propped with pillows round her, and her clear hands spread sometimes to the blazing fire-place. In her eyes no knowledge was of anything around her, neither in her neck the sense of leaning towards anything. Only both her lovely hands were entreating something, to spare her, or to love her; and the lines of supplication quivered in her sad white face.

“All go away, except my mother,” I said very quietly, but so that I would be obeyed; and everybody

knew it. Then mother came to me alone ; and she said, "The frost is in her brain : I have heard of this before, John." "Mother I will have it out," was all that I could answer her ; "leave her to me altogether : only you sit there and watch." For I felt that Lorna knew me, and no other soul but me ; and that if not interfered with, she would soon come home to me. Therefore I sate gently by her, leaving nature, as it were, to her own good time and will. And presently the glance that watched me, as at distance and in doubt, began to flutter and to brighten, and to deepen into kindness, then to beam with trust and love, and then with gathering tears to falter, and in shame to turn away. But the small entreating hands found their way, as if by instinct, to my great protecting palms ; and trembled there, and rested there.

For a little while, we lingered thus, neither wishing to move away, neither caring to look beyond the presence of the other ; both alike so full of hope, and comfort, and true happiness ; if only the world would let us be. And then a little sob disturbed us, and mother tried to make believe that she was only coughing. But Lorna, guessing who she was, jumped up so very rashly that she almost set her frock on fire from the great ash-log ; and away she ran to the old oak chair, where mother was by the clock-case pretending to be knitting, and she took the work from mother's hands, and laid them both upon her head, kneeling humbly, and looking up.

"God bless you, my fair mistress!" said mother

bending nearer, and then as Lorna's gaze prevailed,
"God bless you, my sweet child!"

And so she went to mother's heart, by the very
nearest road, even as she had come to mine; I mean
the road of pity, smoothed by grace, and youth, and
gentleness.

CHAPTER XVII.

JEREMY STICKLES was gone south, ere ever the frost set in, for the purpose of mustering forces to attack the Doone Glen. But, of course, this weather had put a stop to every kind of movement ; for even if men could have borne the cold, they could scarcely be brought to face the perils of the snow-drifts. And to tell the truth I cared not how long this weather lasted, so long as we had enough to eat, and could keep ourselves from freezing. Not only that I did not want Master Stickles back again, to make more disturbances ; but also that the Doones could not come prowling after Lorna, while the snow lay piled between us, with the surface soft and dry. Of course they would very soon discover where their lawful queen was, although the track of sledd and snow-shoes had been quite obliterated by another shower, before the revellers could have grown half as drunk as they intended. But Marwood de Whichehalse, who had been snowed up among them (as Gwenny said) after helping to strip the beacon, that young

Squire was almost certain to have recognized me, and to have told vile Carver. And it gave me no little pleasure to think, how mad that Carver must be with me, for robbing him of the lovely bride, whom he was starving into matrimony. However I was not pleased at all with the prospect of the consequences ; but set all hands on to thresh the corn, ere the Doones could come and burn the ricks. For I knew that they could not come yet ; inasmuch as even a forest pony could not traverse the country, much less the heavy horses needed to carry such men as they were. And hundreds of the forest ponies died in this hard weather, some being buried in the snow, and more of them starved for want of grass.

Going through this state of things, and laying down the law about it (subject to correction), I very soon persuaded Lorna that for the present she was safe, and (which made her still more happy) that she was not only welcome, but as gladdening to our eyes as the flowers of May. Of course, so far as regarded myself, this was not a hundredth part of the real truth ; and even as regarded others, I might have said it ten times over. For Lorna had so won them all, by her kind and gentle ways, and her mode of hearkening to everybody's trouble, and replying without words ; as well as by her beauty, and simple grace of all things, that I could almost wish sometimes the rest would leave her more to me. But mother could not do enough ; and Annie almost worshipped her ; and even Lizzie could not keep her bitterness towards her ; especially when

she found that Lorna knew as much of books as need be.

As for John Fry, and Betty, and Molly, they were a perfect plague, when Lorna came into the kitchen. For betwixt their curiosity to see a live Doone in the flesh (when certain not to eat them), and their high respect for birth (with or without honesty), and their intense desire to know all about Master John's sweet-heart (dropped, as they said, from the snow-clouds), and most of all their admiration of a beauty such as never even their angels could have seen,—betwixt and between all this, I say, there was no getting the dinner cooked, with Lorna in the kitchen.

And the worst of it was that Lorna took the strangest of all strange fancies for this very kitchen ; and it was hard to keep her out of it. Not that she had any special bent for cooking, as our Annie had ; rather indeed the contrary, for she liked to have her food ready cooked ; but that she loved the look of the place, and the cheerful fire burning, and the racks of bacon to be seen, and the richness, and the homeliness, and the pleasant smell of everything. And who knows but what she may have liked (as the very best of maidens do) to be admired, now and then, between the times of business ?

Therefore if you wanted Lorna (as I was always sure to do, God knows how many times a day) the very surest place to find her was our own old kitchen. Not gossiping, I mean, nor loitering, neither seeking into things ; but seeming to be quite at home, as if

she had known it from a child, and seeming (to my eyes at least) to light it up, and make life and colour out of all the dulness ; as I have seen the breaking sun do among brown shocks of wheat.

But any one who wished to learn, whether girls can change or not, as the things around them change (while yet their hearts are steadfast, and for ever anchored), he should just have seen my Lorna, after a fortnight of our life, and freedom from anxiety. It is possible that my company—although I am accounted stupid, by folk who do not know my way—may have had something to do with it ; but upon this I will not say much, lest I lose my character. And indeed, as regards company, I had all the threshing to see to, and more than half to do myself (though any one would have thought that even John Fry must work hard, this weather), else I could not hope at all to get our corn into such compass, that a good gun might protect it.

But to come back to Lorna again (which I always longed to do, and must long for ever), all the change between night and day, all the shifts of cloud and sun, all the difference between black death and brightsome liveliness, scarcely may suggest or equal Lorna's transformation. Quick she had always been, and "peart" (as we say on Exmoor) and gifted with a leap of thought too swift for me to follow ; and hence you may find fault with much, when I report her sayings. But through the whole had always run, as a black string goes through pearls, something dark and touched with shadow, coloured as with an early end.

But, now, behold, there was none of this! There was no getting her, for a moment, even to be serious. All her bright young wit was flashing, like a newly-awakened flame, and all her high young spirits leaped, as if dancing to its fire. And yet she never spoke a word which gave more pain than pleasure.

And even in her outward look there was much of difference. Whether it was our warmth, and freedom, and our harmless love of God, and trust in one another; or whether it were our air, and water, and the pea-fed bacon; any how my Lorna grew richer and more lovely, more perfect and more firm of figure, and more light and buoyant, with every passing day that laid its tribute on her cheeks and lips. I was allowed one kiss a day; only one for manners' sake, because she was our visitor; and I might have it before breakfast, or else when I came to say "good night;" according as I decided. And I decided, every night, not to take it in the morning, but put it off till the evening time, and have the pleasure to think about, through all the day of working. But when my darling came up to me in the early daylight, fresher than the daystar, and with no one looking; only her bright eyes smiling, and sweet lips quite ready, was it likely I could wait, and think all day about it? For she wore a frock of Annie's, nicely made to fit her, taken in at the waist and curved—I never could explain it, not being a mantua-maker; but I know how her figure looked in it, and how it came towards me.

But this is neither here nor there; and I must on

with my story. Those days are very sacred to me, and if I speak lightly of them, trust me 'tis with lip alone ; while from heart reproach peeps sadly at the flippant tricks of mind.

Although it was the longest winter ever known in our parts (never having ceased to freeze for a single night, and scarcely for a single day, from the middle of December till the second week in March), to me it was the very shortest and the most delicious ; and verily I do believe it was the same to Lorna. But when the Ides of March were come (of which I do remember something dim from school, and something clear from my favourite writer), lo there were increasing signals of a change of weather.

One leading feature of that long cold, and a thing remarked by every one (however unobservant) had been the hollow moaning sound ever present in the air, morning, noon, and night-time, and especially at night, whether any wind were stirring, or whether it were a perfect calm. Our people said that it was a witch cursing all the country from the caverns by the sea, and that frost and snow would last until we could catch and drown her. But the land being thoroughly blocked with snow, and the inshore parts of the sea with ice (floating in great fields along), Mother Melldrum (if she it were) had the caverns all to herself, for there was no getting at her. And speaking of the sea reminds me of a thing reported to us, and on good authority ; though people might be found hereafter who would not believe it, unless I told them that from

what I myself beheld of the channel I place perfect faith in it: and this is that a dozen sailors at the beginning of March crossed the ice, with the aid of poles, from Clevedon to Penarth, or where the Holm-rocks barred the flotage.

But now, about the tenth of March, that miserable moaning noise, which had both foregone and accompanied the rigour, died away from out the air; and we, being now so used to it, thought at first that we must be deaf. And then the fog, which had hung about (even in full sunshine), vanished, and the shrouded hills shone forth with brightness manifold. And now the sky at length began to come to its true manner, which we had not seen for months, a mixture (if I so may speak) of various expressions. Whereas till now from All-hallows-tide, six weeks ere the great frost set in, the heavens had worn one heavy mask of ashen grey when clouded, or else one amethystine tinge with a hazy rim, when cloudless. So it was pleasant to behold, after that monotony, the fickle sky which suits our England, though abused by foreign folk.

And soon the dappled softening sky gave some earnest of its mood; for a brisk south wind arose, and the blessed rain came driving; cold indeed, yet most refreshing to the skin, all parched with snow, and the eyeballs so long dazzled. Neither was the heart more sluggish in its thankfulness to God. People had begun to think, and somebody had prophesied, that we should have no spring this year, no seed-time, and no harvest; for that the Lord had sent a judgment on this country of

England, and the nation dwelling in it, because of the wickedness of the Court, and the encouragement shown to Papists. And this was proved, they said, by what had happened in the town of London ; where, for more than a fortnight, such a chill of darkness lay that no man might behold his neighbour, even across the narrowest street ; and where the ice upon the Thames was more than four feet thick, and crushing London bridge in twain. Now to these prophets I paid no heed, believing not that Providence would freeze us for other people's sins ; neither seeing how England could for many generations have enjoyed good sunshine, if Popery meant frost and fogs. Besides, why could not Providence settle the business once for all by freezing the Pope himself ; even though (according to our view) he were destined to extremes of heat, together with all who followed him ?

Not to meddle with that subject, being beyond my judgment, let me tell the things I saw, and then you must believe me. The wind, of course, I could not see, not having the powers of a pig ; but I could see the laden branches of the great oaks moving, hoping to shake off the load packed and saddled on them. And hereby I may note a thing which some one may explain perhaps in the after-ages, when people come to look at things. This is, that in desperate cold all the trees were pulled awry, even though the wind had scattered the snow burden from them. Of some sorts the branches bended downwards, like an archway ; of other sorts the boughs curved upwards, like a red deer's

frontlet. This I know no reason* for; but am ready to swear that I saw it.

Now when the first of the rain began, and the old familiar softness spread upon the window glass, and ran a little way in channels (though from the coldness of the glass it froze before reaching the bottom), knowing at once the difference from the short sharp thud of snow, we all ran out, and filled our eyes and filled our hearts with gazing. True, the snow was piled up now all in mountains round us; true, the air was still so cold that our breath froze on the doorway, and the rain was turned to ice wherever it struck anything: nevertheless that it was rain there was no denying, as we watched it across black doorways, and could see no sign of white. Mother, who had made up her mind that the farm was not worth having, after all those prophecies, and that all of us must starve, and holes be scratched in the snow for us, and no use to put up a tombstone (for our church had been shut up long ago) mother fell upon my breast, and sobbed that I was the cleverest fellow ever born of woman. And this because I had condemned the prophets for a pack of fools; not seeing how business could go on, if people stopped to hearken them.

* The reason is very simple, as all nature's reasons are; though the subject has not yet been investigated thoroughly. In some trees the vascular tissue is more open on the upper side, in others on the under side, of the spreading branches; according to the form of growth, and habit of the sap. Hence in very severe cold, when the vessels (comparatively empty) are constricted, some have more power of contraction on the upper side, and some upon the under.

—ED. L. D.

Then Lorna came and glorified me, for I had predicted a change of weather ; more to keep their spirits up, than with real hope of it ; and then came Annie blushing shyly, as I looked at her and said, that Winnie would soon have four legs now. This referred to some stupid joke made by John Fry or somebody, that in this weather a man had no legs, and a horse had only two.

But as the rain came down upon us from the southwest wind, and we could not have enough of it, even putting our tongues to catch it, as little children might do, and beginning to talk of primroses ; the very noblest thing of all was to hear and see the gratitude of the poor beasts yet remaining and the few surviving birds. From the cowhouse lowing came, more than of fifty milking times ; moo and moo, and a turn-up noise at the end of every bellow, as if from the very heart of kine. Then the horses in the stables, packed as closely as they could stick, at the risk of kicking, to keep the warmth in one another, and their spirits up by dis coursing, these began with one accord to lift up their voices, snorting, snuffling, whinnying, and neighing, and trotting to the door to know when they should have work again. To whom, as if in answer, came the feeble bleating of the sheep, what few, by dint of greatest care, had kept their fleeces on their backs, and their four legs under them.

Neither was it a trifling thing, let whoso will say the contrary, to behold the ducks and geese marching forth in handsome order from their beds of fern and straw. What a goodly noise they kept, what a flapping of their

wings, and a jerking of their tails, as they stood right up and tried with a whistling in their throats to imitate a cockscrow ! And then how daintily they took the wet upon their dusty plumes, and ducked their shoulders to it, and began to dress themselves, and laid their grooved bills on the snow, and dabbled for more ooziness !

Lorna had never seen, I dare say, anything like this before, and it was all that we could do to keep her from rushing forth with only little lambswool shoes on, and kissing every one of them. “Oh, the dear things, oh the dear things !” she kept saying continually, “how wonderfully clever they are ! Only look at that one with his foot up, giving orders to the others, John !”

“And I must give orders to you, my darling,” I answered, gazing on her face, so brilliant with excitement ; “and that is, that you come in at once, with that worrisome cough of yours ; and sit by the fire, and warm yourself.”

“Oh no, John. Not for a minute, if you please, good John. I want to see the snow go away, and the green meadows coming forth. And here comes our favourite robin, who has lived in the oven so long, and sang us a song every morning. I must see what he thinks of it.”

“You will do nothing of the sort,” I answered very shortly ; being only too glad of a cause for having her in my arms again. So I caught her up, and carried her in ; and she looked and smiled so sweetly at me instead of pouting (as I had feared) that I found

myself unable to go very fast along the passage. And I set her there in her favourite place, by the sweet-scented wood-fire ; and she paid me portage, without my even asking her ; and for all the beauty of the rain, I was fain to stay with her ; until our Annie came to say, that my advice was wanted.

Now my advice was never much, as everybody knew quite well ; but that was the way they always put it, when they wanted me to work for them. And in truth it was time for me to work ; not for others, but myself, and (as I always thought) for Lorna. For the rain was now coming down in earnest ; and the top of the snow being frozen at last, and glazed as hard as a China cup, by means of the sun and frost afterwards, all the rain ran right away from the steep inclines, and all the outlets being blocked with ice set up like tables, it threatened to flood everything. Already it was ponding up, like a tide advancing, at the threshold of the door from which we had watched the duck-birds ; both because great piles of snow trended in that direction, in spite of all our scraping, and also that the gulley hole, where the water of the shoot went out (I mean when it was water) now was choked with lumps of ice, as big as a man's body. For the "shoot," as we called our little runnel of everlasting water, never known to freeze before, and always ready for any man either to wash his hands, or drink, where it spouted from a trough of bark, set among white flint-stones ; this at last had given in, and its music ceased to lull us, as we lay in bed.

It was not long before I managed to drain off this threatening flood, by opening the old sluice-hole : but I had much harder work to keep the stables, and the cow-house, and the other sheds, from flooding. For we have a sapient practice (and I never saw the contrary, round about our parts, I mean) of keeping all rooms underground, so that you step down to them. We say that thus we keep them warmer, both for cattle and for men, in the time of winter, and cooler in the summer-time. This I will not contradict, though having my own opinion ; but it seems to me to be a relic of the time when people in the western countries lived in caves beneath the ground, and blocked the mouths with neat-skins.

Let that question still abide, for men who study ancient times to inform me, if they will : all I know is, that now we had no blessings for the system. If after all their cold and starving, our weak cattle now should have to stand up to their knees in water, it would be certain death to them ; and we had lost enough already to make us poor for a long time ; not to speak of our kind love for them. And I do assure you, I loved some horses, and even some cows for that matter, as if they had been my blood-relations ; knowing as I did their virtues. And some of these were lost to us ; and I could not bear to think of them. Therefore I worked hard all night, to try and save the rest of them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THROUGH that season of bitter frost, the red deer of the forest having nothing to feed upon, and no shelter to rest in, had grown accustomed to our ricks of corn, and hay, and clover. There we might see a hundred of them, almost any morning, come for warmth, and food, and comfort, and scarce willing to move away. And many of them were so tame, that they quietly presented themselves at our back door, and stood there with their coats quite stiff, and their flanks drawn in and panting, and icicles sometimes on their chins, and their great eyes fastened wistfully upon any merciful person ; craving for a bit of food, and a drink of water. I suppose that they had not sense enough to chew the snow and melt it ; at any rate, all the springs being frozen, and rivers hidden out of sight, these poor things suffered even more from thirst than they did from hunger.

But now there was no fear of thirst, and more chance indeed of drowning ; for a heavy gale of wind arose, with violent rain from the south-west, which lasted almost without a pause, for three nights and two days.

At first the rain made no impression on the bulk of snow, but ran from every sloping surface, and froze on every flat one, through the coldness of the earth ; and so it became impossible for any man to keep his legs, without the help of a shodden staff. After a good while, however, the air growing very much warmer, this state of things began to change, and a worse one to succeed it ; for now the snow came thundering down from roof, and rock, and ivied tree, and floods began to roar and foam in every trough and gulley. The drifts, that had been so white and fair, looked yellow, and smirched, and muddy, and lost their graceful curves, and moulded lines, and airiness. But the strangest sight of all to me was in the bed of streams, and brooks, and especially of the Lynn river. It was worth going miles to behold such a thing, for a man might never have the chance again.

Vast drifts of snow had filled the valley, and piled above the rivercourse, fifty feet high in many places, and in some as much as a hundred. These had frozen over the top, and glanced the rain away from them, and being sustained by rock and tree, spanned the water mightily. But meanwhile the waxing flood, swollen from every moorland hollow and from every spouting crag, had dashed away all icy fetters, and was rolling gloriously. Under white fantastic arches, and long tunnels freaked and fretted, and between pellucid pillars jagged with nodding architraves, the red impetuous torrent rushed, and the brown foam whirled and flashed. I was half inclined to jump in and swim

through such glorious scenery ; for nothing used to please me more than swimming in a flooded river. But I thought of the rocks, and I thought of the cramp, and more than all of Lorna ; and so, between one thing and another, I let it roll on without me.

It was now high time to work very hard ; both to make up for the farm-work lost during the months of frost and snow ; and also to be ready for a great and vicious attack from the Doones ; who would burn us in our beds at the earliest opportunity. Of farm-work there was little yet for even the most zealous man to begin to lay his hand to : because when the ground appeared through the crust of bubbled snow (as at last it did, though not as my Lorna had expected, at the first few drops of rain), it was all so soaked and sodden, and, as we call it, “mucksy,” that to meddle with it in any way was to do more harm than good. Nevertheless there was yard-work, and house-work, and tendance of stock, enough to save any man from idleness.

As for Lorna, she would come out. There was no keeping her in the house. She had taken up some peculiar notion that we were doing more for her than she had any right to, and that she must earn her living by the hard work of her hands. It was quite in vain to tell her that she was expected to do nothing ; and far worse than vain (for it made her cry sadly) if any one assured her that she could do no good at all. She even began upon mother’s garden before the snow was clean-gone from it, and sowed a beautiful row of peas, every one of which the mice ate.

But though it was very pretty to watch her working for her very life, as if the maintenance of the household hung upon her labours ; yet I was grieved for many reasons, and so was mother also. In the first place, she was too fair and dainty for this rough, rude work ; and though it made her cheeks so bright, it surely must be bad for her to get her little feet so wet. Moreover, we could not bear the idea that she should labour for her keep ; and again (which was the worst of all things), mother's garden lay exposed to a dark deceitful coppice, where a man might lurk and watch all the fair gardener's doings. It was true that none could get at her thence, while the brook which ran between poured so great a torrent. Still the distance was but little for a gun to carry, if any one could be brutal enough to point a gun at Lorna. I thought that none could be found to do it : but mother, having more experience, was not so certain of mankind.

Now, in spite of the floods, and the sloughs being out, and the state of the roads most perilous, Squire Faggus came at last, riding his famous strawberry mare. There was a great ado between him and Annie, as you may well suppose, after some four months of parting. And so we left them alone awhile, to coddle over their raptures. But when they were tired of that, or at least had time enough to be so, mother and I went in to know what news Tom had brought with him. Though he did not seem to want us yet, he made himself agreeable ; and so we sent Annie to cook the dinner, while her sweetheart should tell us everything.

Tom Faggus had very good news to tell, and he told it with such force of expression as made us laugh very heartily. He had taken up his purchase from old Sir Roger Bassett of a nice bit of land, to the south of the moors, and in the parish of Molland. When the lawyers knew thoroughly who he was, and how he had made his money, they behaved uncommouly well to him, and showed great sympathy with his pursuits. He put them up to a thing or two ; and they poked him in the ribs, and laughed, and said that he was quite a boy ; but of the right sort, none the less. And so they made old Squire Bassett pay the bill for both sides ; and all he got for three hundred acres was a hundred and twenty pounds ; though Tom had paid five hundred. But lawyers know that this must be so, in spite of all their endeavours ; and the old gentleman, who now expected to find a bill for him to pay, almost thought himself a rogue, for getting anything out of them.

It is true that the land was poor and wild, and the soil exceeding shallow ; lying on the slope of rock, and burned up in hot summers. But with us, hot summers are things known by tradition only (as this great winter may be) ; we generally have more moisture, especially in July, than we well know what to do with. I have known a fog for a fortnight at the summer solstice, and farmers talking in church about it when they ought to be praying. But it always contrives to come right in the end, as other visitations do ; if we take them as true visits, and receive them kindly.

Now this farm of Squire Faggus (as he truly now had a right to be called) was of the very finest pasture, when it got good store of rain. And Tom, who had ridden the Devonshire roads with many a reeking jacket, knew right well that he might trust the climate for that matter. The herbage was of the very sweetest, and the shortest, and the closest, having perhaps from ten to eighteen inches of wholesome soil between it and the solid rock. Tom saw at once what it was fit for—the breeding of fine cattle.

Being such a hand as he was, at making the most of everything, both his own and other people's (although so free in scattering, when the humour lay upon him), he had actually turned to his own advantage that extraordinary weather, which had so impoverished every one around him. For he taught his Winnie (who knew his meaning as well as any child could, and obeyed not only his word of mouth, but every glance he gave her), to go forth in the snowy evenings when horses are seeking everywhere (be they wild or tame) for fodder and for shelter; and to whinny to the forest ponies, miles away from home perhaps, and lead them all with rare appetite and promise of abundance, to her master's homestead. He shod good Winnie in such a manner that she could not sink in the snow; and he clad her over the loins with a sheep-skin, dyed to her own colour, which the wild horses were never tired of coming up and sniffing at; taking it for an especial gift, and proof of inspiration. And Winnie never came home at night without at least a

score of ponies, trotting shyly after her, tossing their heads and their tails in turn, and making believe to be very wild, although hard pinched by famine. Of course Tom would get them all into his pound in about five minutes; for he himself could neigh in a manner which went to the heart of the wildest horse. And then he fed them well, and turned them into his great cattle-pen, to abide their time for breaking, when the snow and frost should be over.

He had gotten more than three hundred now, in this sagacious manner; and he said it was the finest sight to see their mode of carrying on. How they would snort, and stamp, and fume, and prick their ears, and rush backwards, and lash themselves with their long rough tails, and shake their jagged manes, and scream, and fall upon one another, if a strange man came anigh them. But as for feeding time, Tom said it was better than fifty plays to watch them, and the tricks they were up to, to cheat their feeders, and one another. I asked him how on earth he had managed to get fodder, in such impassable weather, for such a herd of horses; but he said that they lived upon straw and sawdust; and he knew that I did not believe him, any more than about his star-shavings. And this was just the thing he loved—to mystify honest people, and be a great deal too knowing. However I may judge him harshly, because I myself tell everything.

I asked him what he meant to do, with all that enormous lot of horses, and why he had not exerted

his wits to catch the red deer as well. He said that the latter would have been against the laws of venery, and might have brought him into trouble ; but as for disposing of his stud, it would give him little difficulty. He would break them, when the spring weather came on, and deal with them as they required, and keep the handsomest for breeding. The rest he would despatch to London, where he knew plenty of horse-dealers ; and he doubted not that they would fetch him as much as ten pounds apiece all round, being now in great demand. I told him I wished that he might get it : but as it proved afterwards, he did.

Then he pressed us both on another point, the time for his marriage to Annie : and mother looked at me to say when ; and I looked back at mother. However, knowing something of the world, and unable to make any further objection, by reason of his prosperity, I said that we must even do, as the fashionable people did ; and allow the maid herself to settle, when she would leave home and all. And this I spoke with a very bad grace ; being perhaps of an ancient cast, and over fond of honesty—I mean, of course, among lower people.

But Tom paid little heed to this ; knowing the world a great deal better than ever I could pretend to do ; and being ready to take a thing, upon which he had set his mind ; whether it came with a good grace, or whether it came with a bad one. And seeing that it would be awkward to provoke my anger, he left the room, before more words, to submit himself to Annie.

Upon this I went in search of Lorna, to tell her of

our cousin's arrival ; and to ask whether she would think fit to see him, or to dine by herself that day ; for she should do exactly as it pleased her in everything, while remaining still our guest. But I rather wished that she might choose not to sit in Tom's company, though she might be introduced to him. Not but what he could behave quite as well as I could, and much better as regarded elegance and assurance ; only that his honesty had not been as one might desire. But Lorna had some curiosity to know what this famous man was like, and declared that she would by all means have the pleasure of dining with him, if he did not object to her company on the ground of the Doone's dishonesty : moreover, she said that it would seem a most foolish air on her part, and one which would cause the greatest pain to Annie, who had been so good to her, if she should refuse to sit at table with a man who held the King's pardon, and was now a pattern of honesty.

Against this I had not a word to say ; and could not help acknowledging in my heart that she was right, as well as wise, in her decision. And afterwards I discovered that mother would have been much displeased, if she had decided otherwise.

Accordingly she turned away, with one of her very sweetest smiles (whose beauty none can describe), saying that she must not meet a man of such fashion and renown, in her common gardening frock ; but must try to look as nice as she could, if only in honour of 'dear Annie. And truth to tell, when she came to dinner,

everything about her was the neatest and the prettiest that can possibly be imagined. She contrived to match the colours so, to suit one another and her own, and yet with a certain delicate harmony of contrast, and the shape of everything was so nice, that when she came into the room, with a crown of winning modesty upon the consciousness of beauty, I was quite as proud as if the Queen of England entered.

My mother could not help remarking, though she knew that it was not mannerly, how like a princess Lorna looked, now she had her best things on; but two things caught Squire Faggus' eyes, after he had made a most gallant bow, and received a most graceful courtesy; and he kept his bright bold gaze upon them, first on one and then on the other, until my darling was hot with blushes, and I was ready to knock him down, if he had not been our visitor. But here again, I should have been wrong, as I was apt to be in those days; for Tom intended no harm whatever, and his gaze was of pure curiosity; though Annie herself was vexed with it. The two objects of his close regard, were first, and most worthily, Lorna's face, and secondly, the ancient necklace restored to her by Sir Ensor Doone.

Now wishing to save my darling's comfort, and to keep things quiet, I shouted out that dinner was ready, so that half the parish could hear me; upon which my mother laughed, and chid me, and despatched her guests before her. And a very good dinner we made, I remember, and a very happy one; attending to the women first, as now is the manner of eating; except

among the workmen. With them, of course, it is needful that the man (who has his hours fixed) should be served first, and make the utmost of his time for feeding ; while the women may go on, as much as ever they please, afterwards. But with us, who are not bound to time, there is no such reason to be quoted ; and the women, being the weaker vessels, should be the first to begin to fill. And so we always arranged it.

Now, though our Annie was a graceful maid, and Lizzie a very learned one, you should have seen how differently Lorna managed her dining : she never took more than about a quarter of a mouthful at a time, and she never appeared to be chewing that, although she must have done so. Indeed she appeared to dine as if it were a matter of no consequence, and as if she could think of other things more than of her business. All this, and her own manner of eating, I described to Eliza once, when I wanted to vex her for something very spiteful that she had said ; and I never succeeded so well before, for the girl was quite outrageous, having her own perception of it, which made my observation ten times as bitter to her. And I am not sure but what she ceased to like poor Lorna from that day : and if so, I was quite paid out, as I well deserved, for my bit of satire.

For it strikes me that of all human dealings, satire is the very lowest, and most mean and common. It is the equivalent in words, for what bullying is in deeds ; and no more bespeaks a clever man, than the other does

a brave one. These two wretched tricks exalt a fool in his own low esteem, but never in his neighbour's; for the deep common sense of our nature tells that no man of a genial heart, or of any spread of mind, can take pride in either. And though a good man may commit the one fault or the other, now and then by way of outlet, he is sure to have compunctions soon, and to scorn himself more than the sufferer.

Now when the young maidens were gone—for we had quite a high dinner of fashion that day, with Betty Muxworthy waiting, and Gwenny Carfax at the gravy,—and only mother, and Tom, and I remained at the white deal table, with brandy, and schnapps, and hot water jugs; Squire Faggus said quite suddenly, and perhaps on purpose to take us aback, in case of our hiding anything :

“What do you know of the history of that beautiful maiden, good mother?”

“Not half so much as my son does;” mother answered, with a soft smile at me: “and when John does not choose to tell a thing, wild horses will not pull it out of him.”

“That is not at all like me, mother,” I replied rather sadly: “you know almost every word about Lorna, quite as well as I do.”

“Almost every word, I believe, John; for you never tell a falsehood. But the few unknown may be of all the most important to me.”

To this I made no answer, for fear of going beyond the truth, or else of making mischief. Not that I had,

or wished to have, any mystery with mother ; neither was there, in purest truth, any mystery in the matter ; to the utmost of my knowledge. And the only things that I had kept back, solely for mother's comfort, were the death of poor Lord Alan Brandir (if indeed he were dead) and the connexion of Marwood de Whichehalse with the dealings of the Doones, and the threats of Carver Doone against my own prosperity ; and, may be, one or two little things, harrowing more than edifying.

“Come, come,” said Master Faggus, smiling very pleasantly ; “you two understand each other, if any two on earth do. Ah, if I had only had a mother, how different I might have been !” And with that he sighed, in the tone which always overcame mother upon that subject, and had something to do with his getting Annie ; and then he produced his pretty box, full of rolled tobacco, and offered me one, as I now had joined the goodly company of smokers. So I took it, and watched what he did with his own, lest I might go wrong about mine.

But when our cylinders were both lighted, and I enjoying mine wonderfully, and astonishing mother by my skill, Tom Faggus told us that he was sure he had seen my Lorna’s face before, many and many years ago, when she was quite a little child, but he could not remember where it was, or anything more about it at present ; though he would try to do so afterwards. He could not be mistaken he said, for he had noticed her eyes especially ; and had never seen such eyes before,

neither again, until this day. I asked him if he had ever ventured into the Doone-valley ; but he shook his head, and replied that he valued his life a deal too much for that. Then we put it to him, whether anything might assist his memory ; but he said that he knew not of aught to do so, unless it were another glass of schnapps.

This being provided, he grew very wise, and told us clearly and candidly that we were both very foolish. For he said that we were keeping Lorna, at the risk not only of our stock, and the house above our heads, but also of our precious lives ; and after all was she worth it, although so very beautiful ? Upon which I told him, with indignation, that her beauty was the least part of her goodness, and that I would thank him for his opinion, when I had requested it.

“Bravo, our John Ridd !” he answered : “fools will be fools till the end of the chapter : and I might be as big a one, if I were in thy shoes, John. Nevertheless, in the name of God, don’t let that helpless child go about, with a thing worth half the county on her.”

“She is worth all the county herself,” said I ; “and all England put together : but she has nothing worth half a rick of hay upon her ; for the ring I gave her cost only”—and here I stopped, for mother was looking, and I never would tell her how much it had cost me ; though she had tried fifty times to find out.

“Tush, the ring !” Tom Faggus cried, with a contempt that moved me : “I would never have stopped a man for that. But the necklace, you great oaf, the

necklace is worth all your farm put together, and your Uncle Ben's fortune to the back of it; ay and all the town of Dulverton."

"What," said I; "that common glass thing, which she has had from her childhood!"

"Glass indeed! They are the finest brilliants ever I set eyes on: and I have handled a good many."

"Surely," cried mother, now flushing as red as Tom's own cheeks, with excitement; "you must be wrong, or the young mistress would herself have known it."

I was greatly pleased with my mother, for calling Lorna "the young mistress:" it was not done for the sake of her diamonds, whether they were glass or not; but because she felt, as I had done, that Tom Faggus, a man of no birth whatever, was speaking beyond his mark, in calling a lady like Lorna, a "helpless child;" as well as in his general tone, which displayed no deference. He might have been used to the quality, in the way of stopping their coaches, or roystering at hotels with them: but he never had met a high lady before, in equality, and upon virtue; and we both felt that he ought to have known it, and to have thanked us for the opportunity; in a word, to have behaved a great deal more humbly than he had even tried to do.

"Trust me," answered Tom, in his loftiest manner, which Annie said was "so noble," but which seemed to me rather flashy; "trust me, good mother, and simple John, for knowing brilliants, when I see them. I would have stopped an eight-horse coach, with four carabined

outriders, for such a booty as that. But alas, those days are over: those were days worth living in. Ah I never shall know the like again. How fine it was by moonlight!"

"Master Faggus," began my mother, with a manner of some dignity, such as she could sometimes use, by right of her integrity, and thorough kindness to every one; "this is not the tone in which you have hitherto spoken to me, about your former pursuits and life. I fear that the spirits"—but here she stopped, because the spirits were her own, and Tom was our visitor—"what I mean, Master Faggus, is this: you have won my daughter's heart somehow; and you won my consent to the matter, through your honest sorrow, and manly undertaking to lead a different life, and touch no property but your own. Annie is my eldest daughter, and the child of a most upright man. I love her best of all on earth, next to my boy John here"—here mother gave me a mighty squeeze, to be sure that she would have me at least—"and I will not risk my Annie's life, with a man who yearns for the highway."

Having made this very long speech (for her), mother came home upon my shoulder, and wept so that (but for heeding her) I would have taken Tom by the nose, and thrown him, and Winnie after him, over our farm-yard gate. For I am violent when roused; and freely hereby acknowledge it; though even my enemies will own that it takes a great deal to rouse me. But I do consider the grief and tears (when justly caused) of my dearest friends, to be a great deal to rouse me.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOTHING very long abides ; as the greatest of all writers (in whose extent I am for ever lost in raptured wonder ; and yet for ever quite at home, as if his heart were mine, although his brains so different), in a word as Mr. William Shakespeare, in every one of his works insists, with a humoured melancholy. And if my journey to London led to nothing else of advancement, it took me a hundred years in front of what I might else have been, by the most simple accident.

Two women were scolding one another, across the road, very violently, both from up-stair windows ; and I in my hurry for quiet life, and not knowing what might come down upon me, quickened my step for the nearest corner. But suddenly something fell on my head ; and at first I was afraid to look, especially as it weighed heavily. But hearing no breakage of ware, and only the other scold laughing heartily ; I turned me about, and espied a book, which one had cast at the other, hoping to break her window. So I took the book, and tendered it, at the door of the house from

which it had fallen ; but the watchman came along just then ; and the man at the door declared that it never came from their house, and begged me to say no more. This I promised readily, never wishing to make mischief ; and I said, "Good sir, now take the book : and I will go on to my business." But he answered that he would do no such thing ; for the book alone, being hurled so hard, would convict his people of a lewd assault ; and he begged me, if I would do a good turn, to put the book under my coat and go. And so I did : in part at least. For I did not put the book under my coat, but went along with it openly, looking for any to challenge it. Now this book, so acquired, has been not only the joy of my younger days, and main delight of my manhood, but also the comfort, and even the hope, of my now declining years. In a word, it is next to my Bible to me ; and written in equal English ; and if you espy any goodness whatever, in my own loose style of writing ; you must not thank me, John Ridd, for it, but the writer who holds the champion's belt in wit, as I once did in wrestling.

Now as nothing very long abides, it cannot be expected that a woman's anger should last very long, if she be at all of the proper sort. And my mother, being one of the very best, could not long retain her wrath against the Squire Faggus ; especially when she came to reflect, upon Annie's suggestion, how natural, and one might say, how inevitable it was, that a young man fond of adventure, and change, and winning good

profits by jeopardy, should not settle down without some regret to a fixed abode, and a life of sameness, however safe and respectable. And even as Annie put the case, Tom deserved the greater credit for vanquishing so nobly these yearnings of his nature ; and it seemed very hard to upbraid him, considering how good his motives were ; neither could Annie understand how mother could reconcile it with her knowledge of the Bible, and the one sheep that was lost, and the hundredth piece of silver, and the man that went down to Jericho.

Whether Annie's logic was good and sound, I am sure I cannot tell ; but it seemed to me that she ought to have left the Jericho traveller alone, inasmuch as he rather fell among Tom Fagguses, than resembled them. However, her reasoning was too much for mother to hold out against ; and Tom was replaced, and more than that, being regarded now as an injured man. But how my mother contrived to know, that because she had been too hard upon Tom, he must be right about the necklace, is a point which I never could clearly perceive, though no doubt she could explain it.

To prove herself right in the conclusion, she went herself to fetch Lorna ; that the trinket might be examined, before the day grew dark. My darling came in, with a very quick glance and smile at my cigarro (for I was having the third by this time, to keep things in amity) ; and I waved it towards her, as much as to say, "you see that I can do it." And then

mother led her up to the light, for Tom to examine her necklace.

On the shapely curve of her neck it hung, like dew-drops upon a white hyacinth ; and I was vexed that Tom should have the chance to see it there. But even as if she had read my thoughts, or outrun them with her own, Lorna turned away, and softly took the jewels from the place which so much adorned them. And as she turned away, they sparkled through the rich dark waves of hair. Then she laid the glittering circlet in my mother's hands ; and Tom Faggus took it eagerly, and bore it to the window.

“Don’t you go out of sight,” I said ; “you cannot resist such things as those, if they be what you think them.”

“Jack, I shall have to trounce thee yet. I am now a man of honour, and entitled to the duello. What will you take for it, Mistress Lorna ? At a hazard, say now.”

“I am not accustomed to sell things, sir ;” replied Lorna, who did not like him much, else she would have answered sportively : “What is it worth, in your opinion ?”

“Do you think it is worth five pounds, now ?”

“Oh no ! I never had so much money as that in all my life. It is very bright, and very pretty ; but it cannot be worth five pounds, I am sure.”

“What a chance for a bargain ! Oh, if it were not for Annie, I could make my fortune.”

“But, sir, I would not sell it to you, not for twenty

times five pounds. My grandfather was so kind about it ; and I think it belonged to my mother."

"There are twenty-five rose diamonds in it, and twenty-five large brilliants that cannot be matched in London. How say you, Mistress Lorna, to a hundred thousand pounds ?"

My darling's eyes so flashed at this, brighter than any diamonds, that I said to myself, "Well, all have faults ; and now I have found out Lorna's—she is fond of money !" And then I sighed rather heavily ; for of all faults this seems to me one of the worst in a woman. But even before my sigh was finished, I had cause to condemn myself. For Lorna took the necklace very quietly from the hand of Squire Faggus, who had not half done with admiring it, and she went up to my mother with the sweetest smile I ever saw.

"Dear kind mother, I am so glad," she said in a whisper, coaxing mother out of sight of all but me ; "now, you will have it, won't you, dear ? And I shall be so happy ; for a thousandth part of your kindness to me no jewels in the world can match."

I cannot lay before you the grace with which she did it, all the air of seeking favour, rather than conferring it, and the high-bred fear of giving offence, which is of all fears the noblest. Mother knew not what to say. Of course she would never dream of taking such a gift as that ; and yet she saw how sadly Lorna would be disappointed. Therefore mother did, from habit, what she almost always did ; she called me to help her. But knowing that my eyes were full—

for anything noble moves me so, quite as rashly as things pitiful—I pretended not to hear my mother, but to see a wild cat in the dairy.

Therefore, I cannot tell what mother said in reply to Lorna ; for when I came back, quite eager to let my love know how I worshipped her, and how deeply I was ashamed of myself, for meanly wronging her in my heart ; behold Tom Faggus had gotten again the necklace which had such charms for him, and was delivering all around (but especially to Annie, who was wondering at his learning) a dissertation on precious stones, and his sentiments about those in his hand. He said that the work was very ancient, but undoubtedly very good ; the cutting of every line was true, and every angle was in its place. And this, he said, made all the difference in the lustre of the stone, and therefore in its value. For if the facets were ill-matched, and the points of light so ever little out of perfect harmony, all the lustre of the jewel would be loose and wavering, and the central fire dulled ; instead of answering, as it should, to all possibilities of gaze, and overpowering any eye intent on its deeper mysteries. We laughed at the Squire's dissertation ; for how should he know all these things, being nothing better, and indeed much worse, than a mere Northmolton blacksmith ? He took our laughter with much good nature ; having Annie to squeeze his hand and convey her grief at our ignorance : but he said that of one thing he was quite certain, and therein I believed him. To wit that a trinket of this kind never could have belonged to any ignoble family,

but to one of the very highest and most wealthy in England. And looking at Lorna I felt that she must have come from a higher source than the very best of diamonds.

Tom Faggus said that the necklace was made, he would answer for it, in Amsterdam, two or three hundred years ago, long before London jewellers had begun to meddle with diamonds; and on the gold clasp he found some letters, done in some inverted way, the meaning of which was beyond him; also a bearing of some kind, which he believed was a mountain-cat. And thereupon he declared that now he had earned another glass of schnapps, and would Mistress Lorna mix it for him?

I was amazed at his impudence; and Annie, who thought this her business, did not look best pleased; and I hoped that Lorna would tell him at once to go and do it for himself. But instead of that she rose to do it with a soft humility, which went direct to the heart of Tom; and he leaped up with a curse at himself, and took the hot water from her, and would not allow her to do anything except to put the sugar in; and then he bowed to her grandly. I knew what Lorna was thinking of: she was thinking all the time that her necklace had been taken by the Doones with violence upon some great robbery; and that Squire Faggus knew it, though he would not show his knowledge; and that this was perhaps the reason why mother had refused it so.

We said no more about the necklace for a long time

afterwards ; neither did my darling wear it, now that she knew its value, but did not know its history. She came to me the very next day, trying to look cheerful ; and begged me if I loved her (never mind how little) to take charge of it again, as I once had done before, and not even to let her know in what place I stored it. I told her that this last request I could not comply with ; for having been round her neck so often, it was now a sacred thing, more than a million pounds could be. Therefore it should dwell for the present in the neighbourhood of my heart ; and so could not be far from her. At this she smiled her own sweet smile, and touched my forehead with her lips, and wished that she could only learn how to deserve such love as mine.

Tom Faggus took his good departure, which was a kind farewell to me, on the very day I am speaking of, the day after his arrival. Tom was a thoroughly upright man, according to his own standard ; and you might rely upon him always, up to a certain point I mean, to be there or thereabouts. But sometimes things were too many for Tom, especially with ardent spirits, and then he judged, perhaps too much, with only himself for the jury. At any rate, I would trust him fully, for candour and for honesty, in almost every case in which he himself could have no interest. And so we got on very well together ; and he thought me a fool ; and I tried my best not to think anything worse of him.

Scarcely was Tom clean out of sight, and Annie's tears not dry yet (for she always made a point of crying

upon his departure), when in came Master Jeremy Stickles, splashed with mud from head to foot, and not in the very best of humours, though happy to get back again.

“Curse those fellows!” he cried, with a stamp which sent the water hissing from his boot among the embers; “a pretty plight you may call this, for His Majesty’s Commissioner to return to his head-quarters in! Annie, my dear,” for he was always very affable with Annie; “will you help me off with my overalls, and then turn your pretty hand to the gridiron? Not a blessed morsel have I touched for more than twenty-four hours.”

“Surely then you must be quite starving, sir;” my sister replied with the greatest zeal; for she did love a man with an appetite; “how glad I am that the fire is clear!” But Lizzie, who happened to be there, said with her peculiar smile,

“Master Stickles must be used to it; for he never comes back without telling us that.”

“Hush!” cried Annie, quite shocked with her; “how would you like to be used to it? Now, Betty, be quick with the things for me. Pork, or mutton, or deer’s meat, sir? We have some cured since the autumn.”

“Oh deer’s meat, by all means,” Jeremy Stickles answered; “I have tasted none since I left you, though dreaming of it often. Well, this is better than being chased over the moors for one’s life, John. All the way from Landacre Bridge, I have ridden a race for

my precious life, at the peril of my limbs and neck. Three great Doones galloping after me, and a good job for me that they were so big, or they must have overtaken me. Just go and see to my horse, John, that's an excellent lad. He deserves a good turn, this day, from me ; and I will render it to him."

However he left me to do it, while he made himself comfortable : and in truth the horse required care ; he was blown so that he could hardly stand, and plastered with mud, and steaming so that the stable was quite full with it. By the time I had put the poor fellow to rights, his master had finished dinner, and was in a more pleasant humour, having even offered to kiss Annie, out of pure gratitude, as he said ; but Annie answered with spirit that gratitude must not be shown by increasing the obligation. Jeremy made reply to this that his only way to be grateful then was to tell us his story : and so he did, at greater length than I can here repeat it ; for it does not bear particularly upon Lorna's fortunes.

It appears that as he was riding towards us from the town of Southmolton in Devonshire, he found the roads very soft and heavy, and the floods out in all directions ; but met with no other difficulty until he came to Land-acre Bridge. He had only a single trooper with him, a man not of the militia but of the King's army, whom Jeremy had brought from Exeter. As these two descended towards the bridge they observed that both the Kensford water and the River Barle were pouring down in mighty floods from the melting of the snow.

So great indeed was the torrent, after they united, that only the parapets of the bridge could be seen above the water ; the road across either bank being covered and very deep on the hither side. The trooper did not like the look of it, and proposed to ride back again, and round by way of Simonsbath, where the stream is smaller. But Stickles would not have it so, and dashing into the river, swam his horse for the bridge and gained it with some little trouble ; and there he found the water not more than up to his horse's knees perhaps. On the crown of the bridge he turned his horse to watch the trooper's passage, and to help him with directions ; when suddenly he saw him fall headlong into the torrent, and heard the report of a gun from behind, and felt a shock to his own body, such as lifted him out of the saddle. Turning round he beheld three men, risen up from behind the hedge on one side of his onward road, two of them ready to load again, and one with his gun unfired, waiting to get good aim at him. Then Jeremy did a gallant thing, for which I doubt whether I should have had the presence of mind in the danger. He saw that to swim his horse back again would be almost certain death ; as affording such a target, where even a wound must be fatal. Therefore he struck the spurs into the nag, and rode through the water straight at the man who was pointing the long gun at him. If the horse had been carried off his legs, there must have been an end of Jeremy ; for the other men were getting ready to have another shot at him. But luckily the horse galloped right on without any

need for swimming, being himself excited, no doubt, by all he had seen and heard of it. And Jeremy lay almost flat on his neck, so as to give little space for good aim, with the mane tossing wildly in front of him. Now if that young fellow with the gun had his brains as ready as his flint was, he would have shot the horse at once, and then had Stickles at his mercy ; but instead of that he let fly at the man, and missed him altogether, being scared perhaps by the pistol which Jeremy showed him the mouth of. And galloping by at full speed, Master Stickles tried to leave his mark behind him, for he changed the aim of his pistol to the biggest man, who was loading his gun and cursing like ten cannons. But the pistol missed fire, no doubt from the flood which had gurgled in over the holsters ; and Jeremy seeing three horses tethered at a gate just up the hill, knew that he had not yet escaped, but had more of danger behind him. He tried his other great pistol at one of the horses tethered there, so as to lessen (if possible) the number of his pursuers. But the powder again failed him ; and he durst not stop to cut the bridles, hearing the men coming up the hill. So he even made the most of his start, thanking God that his weight was light, compared at least to what theirs was.

And another thing he had noticed which gave him some hope of escaping, to wit that the horses of the Doones, although very handsome animals, were suffering still from the bitter effects of the late long frost, and the scarcity of fodder. “ If they do not catch me up,

or shoot me, in the course of the first two miles, I may see my home again ; " this was what he said to himself, as he turned to mark what they were about, from the brow of the steep hill. He saw the flooded valley shining with the breadth of water, and the trooper's horse on the other side, shaking his drenched flanks and neighing ; and half-way down the hill he saw the three Doones mounting hastily. And then he knew that his only chance lay in the stoutness of his steed.

The horse was in pretty good condition ; and the rider knew him thoroughly, and how to make the most of him ; and though they had travelled some miles that day through very heavy ground, the bath in the river had washed the mud off, and been some refreshment. Therefore Stickles encouraged his nag, and put him into a good hand gallop, heading away towards Withycombe. At first he had thought of turning to the right, and making off for Withypool, a mile or so down the valley ; but his good sense told him that no one there would dare to protect him against the Doones, so he resolved to go on his way ; yet faster than he had intended.

The three villains came after him, with all the speed they could muster ; making sure from the badness of the road that he must stick fast ere long, and so be at their mercy. And this was Jeremy's chiepest fear, for the ground being soft and thoroughly rotten, after so much frost and snow, the poor horse had terrible work of it, with no time to pick the way ; and even more good luck than skill was needed to keep him from foundering.

How Jeremy prayed for an Exmoor fog (such as he had often sworn at), that he might turn aside and lurk, while his pursuers went past him! But no fog came, nor even a storm to damp the priming of their guns; neither was wood or coppice nigh, nor any place to hide in; only hills, and moor, and valleys; with flying shadows over them, and great banks of snow in the corners. At one time poor Stickles was quite in despair; for after leaping a little brook which crosses the track at Newland, he stuck fast in a "dancing bog," as we call them upon Exmoor. The horse had broken through the crust of moss and sedge and marish-weed, and could do nothing but wallow and sink, with the black water spirling over him. And Jeremy, struggling with all his might, saw the three villains now topping the crest, less than a furlong behind him; and heard them shout in their savage delight. With the calmness of despair, he yet resolved to have one more try for it; and scrambling over the horse's head, gained firm land, and tugged at the bridle. The poor nag replied with all his power to the call upon his courage, and reared his forefeet out of the slough, and with straining eyeballs gazed at him. "Now," said Jeremy; "now, my fine fellow!" lifting him with the bridle; and the brave beast gathered the roll of his loins, and sprang from his quagmired haunches. One more spring, and he was on earth again, instead of being under it; and Jeremy leaped on his back, and stooped, for he knew that they would fire. Two bullets whistled over him, as the horse, mad with fright,

dashed forward ; and in five minutes more he had come to the Exe ; and the pursuers had fallen behind him. The Exe, though a much smaller stream than the Barle, now ran in a foaming torrent, unbridged, and too wide for leaping. But Jeremy's horse took the water well ; and both he and his rider were lightened, as well as comforted by it. And as they passed towards Lucott hill, and struck upon the founts of Lynn, the horses of the three pursuers began to tire under them. Then Jeremy Stickles knew that if he could only escape the sloughs, he was safe for the present ; and so he stood up in his stirrups, and gave them a loud halloo, as if they had been so many foxes.

Their only answer was to fire the remaining charge at him ; but the distance was too great for any aim from horseback ; and the dropping bullet idly ploughed the sod upon one side of him. He acknowledged it with a wave of his hat, and laid one thumb to his nose, in the manner fashionable in London for expression of contempt. However, they followed him yet further ; hoping to make him pay out dearly, if he should only miss the track, or fall upon morasses. But the neighbourhood of our Lynn stream is not so very boggy ; and the King's messenger now knew his way as well as any of his pursuers did ; and so he arrived at Plover's Barrows, thankful, and in rare appetite.

“ But was the poor soldier drowned ? ” asked Annie ; “ and you never went to look for him ! Oh, how very dreadful ! ”

“Shot, or drowned ; I know not which. Thank God it was only a trooper. But they shall pay for it, as dearly as if it had been a captain.”

“And how was it you were struck by a bullet, and only shaken in your saddle ? Had you a coat of mail on, or of Milanese chain-armour ? Now, Master Stickles, had you ?”

“No, Mistress Lizzie ; we do not wear things of that kind now-a-days. You are apt, I perceive, at romances. But I happened to have a little flat bottle of the best stoneware slung beneath my saddle-cloak, and filled with the very best *eau-de-vie*, from the George Hotel, at Southmolton. The brand of it now is upon my back. Oh the murderous scoundrels, what a brave spirit they have spilled !”

“You had better set to, and thank God,” said I, “that they have not spilled a braver one.”

CHAPTER XX.

IT was only right in Jeremy Stickles, and of the simplest common sense, that he would not tell, before our girls, what the result of his journey was. But he led me aside in the course of the evening, and told me all about it ; saying that I knew, as well as he did, that it was not woman's business. This I took, as it was meant, for a gentle caution that Lorna (whom he had not seen as yet) must not be informed of any of his doings. Herein I quite agreed with him ; not only for his furtherance ; but because I always think that women, of whatever mind, are best when least they meddle with the things that appertain to men.

Master Stickles complained that the weather had been against him bitterly, closing all the roads around him ; even as it had done with us. It had taken him eight days, he said, to get from Exeter to Plymouth ; whither he found that most of the troops had been draughted off from Exeter. When all were told, there was but a battalion of one of the King's horse-regiments, and two companies of foot-soldiers ; and their

commanders had orders, later than the date of Jeremy's commission, on no account to quit the southern coast, and march inland. Therefore, although they would gladly have come for a brush with the celebrated Doones, it was more than they durst attempt, in the face of their instructions. However they spared him a single trooper, as a companion of the road, and to prove to the justices of the county, and the lord-lieutenant, that he had their approval.

To these authorities, Master Stickles now was forced to address himself, although he would rather have had one trooper, than a score from the very best trained bands. For these trained bands had afforded very good soldiers, in the time of the civil wars, and for some years afterwards ; but now their discipline was gone ; and the younger generation had seen no real fighting. Each would have his own opinion, and would want to argue it ; and if he were not allowed, he went about his duty in such a temper as to prove that his own way was the best.

Neither was this the worst of it ; for Jeremy made no doubt but what (if he could only get the militia to turn out in force) he might manage, with the help of his own men, to force the stronghold of the enemy ; but the truth was that the officers, knowing how hard it would be to collect their men at that time of the year, and in that state of the weather, began with one accord to make every possible excuse. And especially they pressed this point, that Bagworthy was not in their county ; the Devonshire people affirming vehemently

that it lay in the shire of Somerset, and the Somersetshire folk averring, even with imprecations, that it lay in Devonshire. Now I believe the truth to be that the boundary of the two counties, as well as of Oare and Brendon parishes, is defined by the Bagworthy river ; so that the disputants, on both sides, were both right and wrong.

Upon, this, Master Stickles suggested, and as I thought very sensibly, that the two counties should unite, and equally contribute to the extirpation of this pest, which shamed and injured them both alike. But hence arose another difficulty ; for the men of Devon said they would march, when Somerset had taken the field ; and the sons of Somerset replied that indeed they were quite ready, but what were their cousins of Devonshire doing ? And so it came to pass that the King's Commissioner returned, without any army whatever ; but with promise of two hundred men when the roads should be more passable. And meanwhile, what were we to do, abandoned as we were, to the mercies of the Doones, with only our own hands to help us ? And herein I grieved at my own folly, in having let Tom Faggus go ; whose wit and courage would have been worth at least half-a-dozen men to us. Upon this matter I held long council with my good friend Stickles ; telling him all about Lorna's presence, and what I knew of her history. He agreed with me that we could not hope to escape an attack from the outlaws, and the more especially now that they knew himself to be returned to us. Also he praised me for my forethought

in having threshed out all our corn, and hidden the produce in such a manner that they were not likely to find it. Furthermore, he recommended that all the entrances to the house should at once be strengthened, and a watch must be maintained at night; and he thought it wiser that I should go (late as it was) to Lynmouth, if a horse could pass the valley, and fetch every one of his mounted troopers, who might now be quartered there. Also if any men of courage, though capable only of handling a pitchfork, could be found in the neighbourhood, I was to try to summon them. But our district is so thinly peopled, that I had little faith in this; however my errand was given me, and I set forth upon it; for John Fry was afraid of the waters.

Knowing how fiercely the floods were out, I resolved to travel the higher road, by Cosgate and through Countisbury; therefore I swam my horse through the Lynn, at the ford below our house (where sometimes you may step across), and thence galloped up and along the hills. I could see all the inland valleys ribbon'd with broad waters; and in every winding crook, the banks of snow that fed them; while on my right the turbid sea was flaked with April showers. But when I descended the hill towards Lynmouth, I feared that my journey was all in vain.

For the East Lynn (which is our river) was ramping and roaring frightfully, lashing whole trunks of trees on the rocks, and rending them, and grinding them. And into it rushed, from the opposite side, a torrent even madder; upsetting what it came to aid; shattering

wave with boiling billow, and scattering wrath with fury. It was certain death to attempt the passage: and the little wooden footbridge had been carried away long ago. And the men I was seeking must be, of course, on the other side of this deluge, for on my side there was not a single house.

I followed the bank of the flood to the beach, some two or three hundred yards below; and there had the luck to see Will Watcombe on the opposite side, caulking an old boat. Though I could not make him hear a word, from the deafening roar of the torrent, I got him to understand at last that I wanted to cross over. Upon this he fetched another man, and the two of them launched a boat; and paddling well out to sea, fetched round the mouth of the frantic river. The other man proved to be Stickles' chief mate; and so he went back and fetched his comrades, bringing their weapons, but leaving their horses behind. As it happened there were but four of them; however to have even these was a help; and I started again at full speed for my home; for the men must follow afoot, and cross our river high up on the moorland.

This took them a long way round, and the track was rather bad to find, and the sky already darkening; so that I arrived at Plover's Barrows, more than two hours before them. But they had done a sagacious thing, which was well worth the delay; for by hoisting their flag upon the hill, they fetched the two watchmen from the Foreland, and added them to their number.

It was lucky that I came home so soon; for I found

the house in a great commotion, and all the women trembling. When I asked what the matter was, Lorna, who seemed the most self-possessed, answered that it was all her fault, for she alone had frightened them. And this in the following manner. She had stolen out to the garden towards dusk, to watch some favourite hyacinths just pushing up, like a baby's teeth, and just attracting the fatal notice, of a great house-snail at night-time. Lorna at last had discovered the glutton, and was bearing him off in triumph to the tribunal of the ducks, when she descried two glittering eyes glaring at her steadfastly, from the elder-bush beyond the stream. The elder was smoothing its wrinkled leaves, being at least two months behind time; and among them this calm cruel face appeared; and she knew it the face of Carver Doone.

The maiden, although so used to terror (as she told me once before), lost all presence of mind hereat, and could neither shriek nor fly, but only gaze, as if bewitched. Then Carver Doone, with his deathly smile, gloating upon her horror, lifted his long gun, and pointed full at Lorna's heart. In vain she strove to turn away; fright had stricken her stiff as stone. With the inborn love of life, she tried to cover the vital part wherein the winged death must lodge—for she knew Carver's certain aim—but her hands hung numbed, and heavy: in nothing but her eyes was life.

With no sign of pity in his face, no quiver of relenting, but a well-pleased grin at all the charming palsy of his victim, Carver Doone lowered, inch by inch, the

muzzle of his gun. When it pointed to the ground, between her delicate arched insteps, he pulled the trigger, and the bullet flung the mould all over her. It was a refinement of bullying, for which I swore to God that night, upon my knees, in secret, that I would smite down Carver Doone ; or else he should smite me down. Base beast ! what largest humanity, or what dreams of divinity, could make a man put up with this ?

My darling (the loveliest, and most harmless, in the world of maidens) fell away on a bank of grass, and wept at her own cowardice ; and trembled, and wondered where I was ; and what I would think of this. Good God ! What could I think of it ? She over-rated my slow nature, to admit the question.

While she leaned there, quite unable yet to save herself, Carver came to the brink of the flood, which alone was between them ; and then he stroked his jet-black beard, and waited for Lorna to begin. Very likely, he thought that she would thank him for his kindness to her. But she was now recovering the power of her nimble limbs ; and ready to be off like hope, and wonder at her own cowardice.

“ I have spared you, this time,” he said, in his deep calm voice ; “ only because it suits my plans ; and I never yield to temper. But unless you come back to-morrow, pure, and with all you took away, and teach me to destroy that fool, who has destroyed himself for you ; your death is here, your death is here ; where it has long been waiting.”

Although his gun was empty, he struck the breech of it with his finger; and then he turned away, not deigning even once to look back again; and Lorna saw his giant figure striding across the meadow-land, as if the Ridds were nobodies, and he the proper owner. Both mother and I were greatly hurt at hearing of this insolence: for we had owned that meadow, from the time of the great Alfred; and even when that good king lay in the Isle of Athelney, he had a Ridd along with him.

Now I spoke to Lorna gently, seeing how much she had been tried; and I praised her for her courage, in not having run away, when she was so unable; and my darling was pleased with this, and smiled upon me for saying it; though she knew right well that, in this matter, my judgment was not impartial. But you may take this as a general rule, that a woman likes praise from the man whom she loves, and cannot stop always to balance it.

Now expecting a sharp attack that night—which Jeremy Stickles the more expected, after the words of Carver, which seemed to be meant to mislead us—we prepared a great quantity of knuckles of pork, and a ham in full cut, and a fillet of hung mutton. For we would almost surrender rather than keep our garrison hungry. And all our men were exceedingly brave; and counted their rounds of the house in half-pints.

Before the maidens went to bed, Lorna made a remark which seemed to me a very clever one, and then I wondered how on earth it had never occurred

to me before. But first she had done a thing which I could not in the least approve of: for she had gone up to my mother, and thrown herself into her arms, and begged to be allowed to return to Glen Doone.

“My child, are you unhappy here?” mother asked her, very gently, for she had begun to regard her now as a daughter of her own.

“Oh no! Too happy, by far too happy, Mrs. Ridd. I never knew rest or peace before, or met with real kindness. But I cannot be so ungrateful, I cannot be so wicked, as to bring you all into deadly peril, for my sake alone. Let me go: you must not pay this great price for my happiness.”

“Dear child, we are paying no price at all,” replied my mother, embracing her: “we are not threatened for your sake only. Ask John, he will tell you. He knows every bit about politics, and this is a political matter.”

Dear mother was rather proud in her heart, as well as terribly frightened, at the importance now accruing to Plover’s Barrows farm; and she often declared that it would be as famous in history as the Rye House, or the Meal-tub, or even the great black box, in which she was a firm believer: and even my knowledge of politics could not move her upon that matter. “Such things had happened before,” she would say, shaking her head with its wisdom; “and why might they not happen again? Women would be women, and men would be men, to the end of the chapter; and if she had been in Lucy Water’s place, she would keep it

quiet, as she had done ;" and then she would look round, for fear, lest either of her daughters had heard her ; "but now, can you give me any reason, why it may not have been so ? You are so fearfully positive, John : just as men always are." "No," I used to say ; "I can give you no reason, why it may not have been so, mother. But the question is, if it was so, or not ; rather than what it might have been. And, I think, it is pretty good proof against it, that what nine men of every ten in England would only too gladly believe, if true, is nevertheless kept dark from them." "There you are again, John," mother would reply ; "all about men, and not a single word about women. If you had any argument at all, you would own that marriage is a question, upon which women are the best judges." "Oh !" I would groan in my spirit, and go : leaving my dearest mother quite sure, that now at last she must have convinced me. But if mother had known that Jeremy Stickles was working against the black box, and its issue, I doubt whether he would have fared so well, even though he was a visitor. However, she knew that something was doing, and something of importance ; and she trusted in God for the rest of it. Only she used to tell me, very seriously, of an evening, "The very least they can give you, dear John, is a coat of arms. Be sure you take nothing less, dear ; and the farm can well support it."

But lo ! I have left Lorna ever so long, anxious to consult me upon political matters. She came to me, and her eyes alone asked a hundred questions, which I

rather had answered upon her lips, than troubled her pretty ears with them. Therefore I told her nothing at all, save that the attack (if any should be) would not be made on her account ; and that if she should hear, by any chance, a trifle of a noise in the night, she was to wrap the clothes around her, and shut her beautiful eyes again. On no account, whatever she did, was she to go to the window. She liked my expression about her eyes, and promised to do the very best she could ; and then she crept so very close, that I needs must have her closer ; and with her head on my breast she asked,

“Can’t you keep out of this fight, John ?”

“My own one,” I answered, gazing through the long black lashes, at the depths of radiant love ; “I believe there will be nothing : but what there is I must see out.”

“Shall I tell you what I think, John ? It is only a fancy of mine, and perhaps it is not worth telling.”

“Let us have it, dear, by all means. You know so much about their ways.”

“What I believe is this, John. You know how high the rivers are, higher than ever they were before, and twice as high, you have told me. I believe that Glen Doone is flooded, and all the houses under water.”

“You little witch,” I answered ; “what a fool I must be not to think of it ! Of course it is : it must be. The torrent from all the Bagworthy forest, and all the valleys above it, and the great drifts in the glen itself,

never could have outlet down my famous waterslide. The valley must be under water twenty feet at least. Well, if ever there was a fool, I am he, for not having thought of it."

"I remember once before," said Lorna, reckoning on her fingers; "when there was very heavy rain, all through the autumn and winter, five or it may be six years ago, the river came down with such a rush that the water was two feet deep in our rooms, and we all had to camp by the cliff-edge. But you think that the floods are higher now, I believe I heard you say, John."

"I don't think about it, my treasure," I answered; "you may trust me for understanding floods, after our work at Tiverton. And I know that the deluge in all our valleys is such as no living man can remember, neither will ever behold again. Consider three months of snow, snow, snow, and a fortnight of rain on the top of it, and all to be drained in a few days away! And great barricades of ice still in the rivers blocking them up, and ponding them. You may take my word for it, Mistress Lorna, that your pretty bower is six feet deep."

"Well, my bower has served its time," said Lorna, blushing as she remembered all that had happened there; "and my bower now is here, John. But I am so sorry to think of all the poor women flooded out of their houses and sheltering in the snowdrifts. However there is one good of it: they cannot send many men against us, with all this trouble upon them."

"You are right," I replied : "how clever you are ; and that is why there were only three to cut off Master Stickles. And now we shall beat them, I make no doubt, even if they come at all. And I defy them to fire the house : the thatch is too wet for burning."

We sent all the women to bed quite early, except Gwenny Carfax, and our old Betty. These two we allowed to stay up, because they might be useful to us, if they could keep from quarrelling. For my part, I had little fear, after what Lorna had told me, as to the result of the combat. It was not likely that the Doones could bring more than eight or ten men against us, while their homes were in such danger : and to meet these we had eight good men, including Jeremy and myself, all well-armed and resolute, besides our three farm-servants, and the parish-clerk, and the shoemaker. These five could not be trusted much for any valiant conduct, although they spoke very confidently over their cans of cider. Neither were their weapons fitted for much execution, unless it were at close quarters, which they would be likely to avoid. Bill Dadds had a sickle, Jem Slocombe a flail, the cobbler had borrowed the constable's staff (for the constable would not attend, because there was no warrant), and the parish-clerk had brought his pitch-pipe, which was enough to break any man's head. But John Fry, of course, had his blunderbuss, loaded with tin-tacks and marbles, and more likely to kill the man who discharged it than any other person : but we knew that John had it only for show, and to describe its qualities.

Now it was my great desire, and my chiefest hope, to come across Carver Doone that night, and settle the score between us ; not by any shot in the dark, but by a conflict man to man. As yet, since I came to full-grown power, I had never met any one whom I could not play tee-totum with : but now at last I had found a man whose strength was not to be laughed at. I could guess it in his face, I could tell it in his arms, I could see it in his stride and gait, which more than all the rest betray the substance of a man. And being so well used to wrestling, and to judge antagonists, I felt that here (if anywhere) I had found my match.

Therefore I was not content to abide within the house, or go the rounds with the troopers ; but betook myself to the rickyard, knowing that the Doones were likely to begin their onset there. For they had a pleasant custom, when they visited farm-houses, of lighting themselves towards picking up anything they wanted, or stabbing the inhabitants, by first creating a blaze in the rickyard. And though our ricks were all now of mere straw (except indeed two of prime clover-hay), and although on the top they were so wet that no firebrands might hurt them ; I was both unwilling to have them burned, and fearful that they might kindle, if well roused up with fire upon the windward side.

By the by, these Doones had got the worst of this pleasant trick one time. For happening to fire the ricks of a lonely farm called Yeanworthy, not far above Glenthorne, they approached the house to get

people's goods, and to enjoy their terror. The master of the farm was lately dead, and had left, inside the clock-case, loaded, the great long gun, wherewith he had used to sport at the ducks and the geese on the shore. Now Widow Fisher took out this gun, and not caring much what became of her (for she had loved her husband dearly) she laid it upon the window-sill, which looked upon the rickyard ; and she backed up the butt with a chest of oak drawers, and she opened the window a little back, and let the muzzle out on the slope. Presently five or six fine young Doones came dancing a reel (as their manner was) betwixt her and the flaming rick. Upon which she pulled the trigger, with all the force of her thumb, and a quarter of a pound of duck-shot went out with a blaze on the dancers. You may suppose what their dancing was, and their reeling how changed to staggering, and their music none of the sweetest. One of them fell into the rick, and was burned, and buried in a ditch next day ; but the others were set upon their horses, and carried home on a path of blood. And strange to say, they never avenged this very dreadful injury ; but having heard that a woman had fired this desperate shot among them, they said that she ought to be a Doone, and enquired how old she was.

Now I had not been so very long waiting in our mow-yard, with my best gun ready, and a big club by me, before a heaviness of sleep began to creep upon me. The flow of water was in my ears, and in my eyes a hazy spreading, and upon my brain a closure,

as a cobbler sews a vamp up. So I leaned back in the clover-rick, and the dust of the seed and the smell came round me, without any trouble ; and I dozed about Lorna, just once or twice, and what she had said about new-mown hay ; and then back went my head, and my chin went up ; and if ever a man was blest with slumber, down it came upon me, and away went I into it.

Now this was very vile of me, and against all good resolutions, even such as I would have sworn to, an hour ago or less. But if you had been in the water as I had, ay, and had long fight with it, after a good day's work, and then great anxiety afterwards, and brain-work (which is not fair for me) and upon that a stout supper, mayhap you would not be so hard on my sleep ; though you felt it your duty to wake me.

CHAPTER XXI.

IT was not likely that the outlaws would attack our premises until some time after the moon was risen ; because it would be too dangerous to cross the flooded valleys in the darkness of the night. And but for this consideration, I must have striven harder against the stealthy approach of slumber. But even so, it was very foolish to abandon watch, especially in such as I, who sleep like any dormouse. Moreover I had chosen the very worst place in the world for such employment, with a goodly chance of awaking in a bed of solid fire.

And so it might have been, nay, it must have been, but for Lorna's vigilance. Her light hand upon my arm awoke me, not too readily ; and leaping up, I seized my club, and prepared to knock down somebody.

“Who's that ?” I cried : “stand back, I say, and let me have fair chance at you.”

“Are you going to knock me down, dear John ?” replied the voice I loved so well : “I am sure I should never get up again, after one blow from you, John.”

“My darling, is it you?” I cried; “and breaking all your orders? Come back into the house at once: and nothing on your head, dear!”

“How could I sleep, while at any moment you might be killed beneath my window? And now is the time of real danger; for men can see to travel.”

I saw at once the truth of this. The moon was high and clearly lighting all the watered valleys. To sleep any longer might be death, not only to myself, but all.

“The man on guard at the back of the house is fast asleep,” she continued; “Gwenny, who let me out, and came with me, has heard him snoring for two hours. I think the women ought to be the watch, because they have had no travelling. Where do you suppose little Gwenny is?”

“Surely not gone to Glen Doone?” I was not sure however: for I could believe almost anything of the Cornish maiden’s hardihood.

“No,” replied Lorna, “although she wanted even to do that. But of course I would not hear of it, on account of the swollen waters. But she is perched in yonder tree, which commands the Barrow valley. She says that they are almost sure to cross the streamlet there; and now it is so wide and large, that she can trace it in the moonlight, half-a-mile beyond her. If they cross, she is sure to see them, and in good time to let us know.”

“What a shame,” I cried, “that the men should sleep, and the maidens be the soldiers! I will sit in

that tree myself, and send little Gwenny back to you. Go to bed, my best and dearest; I will take good care not to sleep again."

"Please not to send me away, dear John:" she answered very mournfully: "you and I have been together through perils worse than this. I shall only be more timid, and more miserable, indoors."

"I cannot let you stay here," I said; "it is altogether impossible. Do you suppose that I can fight, with you among the bullets, Lorna? If this is the way you mean to take it, we had better go both to the apple-room, and lock ourselves in, and hide under the tiles, and let them burn all the rest of the premises."

At this idea Lorna laughed, as I could see by the moonlight; and then she said,

"You are right, John. I should only do more harm than good: and of all things I hate fighting most, and disobedience next to it. Therefore I will go indoors, although I cannot go to bed. But promise me one thing, dearest John. You will keep yourself out of the way, now won't you, as much as you can, for my sake?"

"Of that you may be quite certain, Lorna. I will shoot them all through the hay-ricks."

"That is right, dear," she answered, never doubting but what I could do it; "and then they cannot see you, you know. But don't think of climbing that tree, John: it is a great deal too dangerous. It is all very well for Gwenny; she has no bones to break."

"None worth breaking, you mean, I suppose. Very

well ; I will not climb the tree ; for I should defeat my own purpose, I fear ; being such a conspicuous object. Now go indoors, darling, without more words. The more you linger, the more I shall keep you."

She laughed her own bright laugh at this, and only said, "God keep you, love!" and then away she tripped across the yard, with the step I loved to watch so. And thereupon I shouldered arms, and resolved to tramp till morning. For I was vexed at my own neglect, and that Lorna should have to right it.

But before I had been long on duty, making the round of the ricks and stables, and hailing Gwenny now and then from the bottom of her tree, a short wide figure stole towards me, in and out the shadows, and I saw that it was no other than the little maid herself, and that she bore some tidings.

"Ten on 'em crossed the watter down yonner," said Gwenny, putting her hand to her mouth, and seeming to regard it as good news rather than otherwise : "be arl craping up by hedge-row now. I could shutt dree on 'em from the bar of the gate, if so be I had your goon, young man."

"There is no time to lose, Gwenny. Run to the house and fetch Master Stickles, and all the men ; while I stay here, and watch the rick-yard."

Perhaps I was wrong in heeding the ricks at such a time as that ; especially as only the clover was of much importance. But it seemed to me like a sort of triumph that they should even be able to boast of having fired our mow-yard. Therefore I stood in a

nick of the clover, whence we had cut some trusses, with my club in hand, and gun close by.

The robbers rode into our yard as coolly as if they had been invited, having lifted the gate from the hinges first, on account of its being fastened. Then they actually opened our stable-doors, and turned our honest horses out, and put their own rogues in the place of them. At this my breath was quite taken away; for we think so much of our horses. By this time, I could see our troopers, waiting in the shadow of the house, round the corner from where the Doones were, and expecting the order to fire. But Jeremy Stickles very wisely kept them in readiness, until the enemy should advance upon them.

“Two of you lazy fellows go,” it was the deep voice of Carver Doone; “and make us a light, to cut their throats by. Only one thing, once again. If any man touches Lorna, I will stab him where he stands. She belongs to me. There are two other young damsels here, whom you may take away if you please. And the mother, I hear, is still comely. Now for our rights. We have borne too long the insolence of these yokels. Kill every man, and every child, and burn the cursed place down.”

As he spoke thus blasphemously, I set my gun against his breast; and by the light buckled from his belt, I saw the little “sight” of brass gleaming alike upon either side, and the sleek round barrel glimmering. The aim was sure as death itself. If I only drew the trigger (which went very lightly) Carver

Doone would breathe no more. And yet,—will you believe me?—I could not pull the trigger. Would to God, that I had done so!

For I never had taken human life, neither done bodily harm to man; beyond the little bruises, and the trifling aches and pains, which follow a good and honest bout in the wrestling ring. Therefore I dropped my carbine, and grasped again my club, which seemed a more straightforward implement.

Presently two young men came towards me, bearing brands of resined hemp, kindled from Carver's lamp. The foremost of them set his torch to the rick within a yard of me, the smoke concealing me from him. I struck him with a back-handed blow on the elbow, as he bent it; and I heard the bone of his arm break, as clearly as ever I heard a twig snap. With a roar of pain, he fell on the ground, and his torch dropped there, and singed him. The other man stood amazed at this, not having yet gained sight of me; till I caught his firebrand from his hand, and struck it into his countenance. With that he leaped at me; but I caught him, in a manner learned from early wrestling, and snapped his collar-bone, as I laid him upon the top of his comrade.

This little success so encouraged me, that I was half inclined to advance, and challenge Carver Doone to meet me; but I bore in mind that he would be apt to shoot me without ceremony; and what is the utmost of human strength against the power of powder? Moreover I remembered my promise to sweet Lorna; and

who would be left to defend her, if the rogues got rid of me?

While I was hesitating thus (for I always continue to hesitate, except in actual conflict) a blaze of fire lit up the house, and brown smoke hung around it. Six of our men had let go at the Doones, by Jeremy Stickles' order, as the villains came swaggering down in the moonlight ready for rape or murder. Two of them fell, and the rest hung back, to think at their leisure what this was. They were not used to this sort of thing: it was neither just nor courteous.

Being unable any longer to contain myself, as I thought of Lorna's excitement at all this noise of firing, I came across the yard, expecting whether they would shoot at me. However, no one shot at me; and I went up to Carver Doone, whom I knew by his size in the moonlight, and I took him by the beard, and said, "Do you call yourself a man?"

For a moment, he was so astonished that he could not answer. None had ever dared, I suppose, to look at him in that way; and he saw that he had met his equal, or perhaps his master. And then he tried a pistol at me; but I was too quick for him.

"Now, Carver Doone, take warning," I said to him, very soberly; "you have shown yourself a fool, by your contempt of me. I may not be your match in craft; but I am in manhood. You are a despicable villain. Lie low in your native muck."

And with that word, I laid him flat upon his back in our straw-yar, by ad trick of the inner heel, which

he could not have resisted (though his strength had been twice as great as mine), unless he were a wrestler. Seeing him down, the others ran, though one of them made a shot at me, and some of them got their horses, before our men came up ; and some went away without them. And among these last was Captain Carver, who arose, while I was feeling myself (for I had a little wound), and strode away with a train of curses enough to poison the light of the moon.

We gained six very good horses, by this attempted rapine, as well as two young prisoners, whom I had smitten by the clover-rick. And two dead Doones were left behind, whom (as we buried them in the church-yard, without any service over them) I for my part was most thankful that I had not killed. For to have the life of a fellow-man laid upon one's conscience—deserved he his death, or deserved it not—is to my sense of right and wrong the heaviest of all burdens ; and the one that wears most deeply inwards, with the dwelling of the mind on this view and on that of it.

I was inclined to pursue the enemy and try to capture more of them ; but Jeremy Stickles would not allow it, for he said that all the advantage would be upon their side, if we went hurrying after them, with only the moon to guide us. And who could tell but what there might be another band of them, ready to fall upon the house, and burn it, and seize the women, if we left them unprotected ? When he put the case thus, I was glad enough to abide by his decision. And one thing was quite certain, that the Doones had

never before received so rude a shock, and so violent a blow to their supremacy, since first they had built up their power, and become the Lords of Exmoor. I knew that Carver Doone would gnash those mighty teeth of his, and curse the men around him, for the blunder (which was in truth his own) of over confidence and carelessness. And at the same time, all the rest would feel that such a thing had never happened, while old Sir Ensor was alive ; and that it was caused by nothing short of gross mismanagement.

I scarcely know who made the greatest fuss about my little wound, mother, or Annie, or Lorna. I was heartily ashamed to be so treated like a milksop ; but most unluckily it had been impossible to hide it. For the ball had cut along my temple, just above the eye-brow ; and being fired so near at hand, the powder too had scarred me. Therefore it seemed a great deal worse than it really was ; and the sponging, and the plastering, and the sobbing, and the moaning, made me quite ashamed to look Master Stickles in the face.

However, at last I persuaded them that I had no intention of giving up the ghost that night ; and then they all fell to, and thanked God with an emphasis quite unknown in church. And hereupon Master Stickles said, in his free and easy manner (for no one courted his observation), that I was the luckiest of all mortals in having a mother, and a sister, and a sweetheart, to make much of me. For his part, he said, he was just as well off, in not having any to care for

him. For now he might go and get shot, or stabbed, or knocked on the head, at his pleasure, without any one being offended. I made bold, upon this, to ask him what was become of his wife ; for I had heard him speak of having one. He said that he neither knew nor cared ; and perhaps I should be like him some day. That Lorna should hear such sentiments was very grievous to me. But she looked at me with a smile, which proved her contempt for all such ideas ; and lest anything still more unfit might be said, I dismissed the question.

But Master Stickles told me afterwards, when there was no one with us, to have no faith in any woman, whatever she might seem to be. For he assured me that now he possessed very large experience, for so small a matter ; being thoroughly acquainted with women of every class, from ladies of the highest blood, to Bona-robas, and peasants' wives : and that they all might be divided into three heads and no more ; that is to say as follows. First, the very hot and passionate, who were only contemptible ; second, the cold and indifferent, who were simply odious ; and third, the mixture of the other two, who had the bad qualities of both. As for reason, none of them had it : it was like a sealed book to them, which if they ever tried to open, they began at the back of the cover.

Now, I did not like to hear such things ; and to me they appeared to be insolent, as well as narrow-minded. For if you came to that, why might not men, as well as women, be divided into the same three

classes, and be pronounced upon by women, as beings even more devoid than their gentle judges of reason? Moreover I knew, both from my own sense, and from the greatest of all great poets, that there are, and always have been, plenty of women, good, and gentle, warm-hearted, loving, and lovable; very keen, moreover, at seeing the right, be it by reason, or otherwise. And upon the whole, I prefer them much to the people of my own sex; as goodness of heart is more important than to show good reason for having it. And so I said to Jeremy,—

“ You have been ill-treated, perhaps, Master Stickles, by some woman or other? ”

“ Ay, that have I; ” he replied with an oath; “ and the last on earth who should serve me so, the woman who was my wife. A woman whom I never struck, never wronged in any way, never even let her know that I liked another better. And yet when I was at Berwick last, with the regiment on guard there against those vile moss-troopers, what does that woman do but fly in the face of all authority, and of my especial business, by running away herself with the biggest of all moss-troopers? Not that I cared a groat about her; and I wish the fool well-rid of her: but the insolence of the thing was such that everybody laughed at me; and back I went to London, losing a far better and safer job than this; and all through her. Come, let’s have another onion.”

Master Stickles’ view of the matter was so entirely unromantic, that I scarcely wondered at Mistress

Stickles, for having run away from him to an adventurous moss-trooper. For nine women out of ten must have some kind of romance or other, to make their lives endurable ; and when their love has lost this attractive element, this soft dew-fog (if such it be), the love itself is apt to languish ; unless its bloom be well replaced by the budding hopes of children. Now Master Stickles neither had, nor wished to have, any children.

Without waiting for any warrant, only saying something about "*captus in flagrante delicto*"—if that be the way to spell it—Stickles sent our prisoners off, bound and looking miserable, to the jail at Taunton. I was desirous to let them go free, if they would promise amendment ; but although I had taken them, and surely therefore had every right to let them go again, Master Stickles said, "Not so." He assured me that it was a matter of publick polity ; and of course, not knowing what he meant, I could not contradict him ; but thought that surely my private rights ought to be respected. For if I throw a man in wrestling, I expect to get his stakes ; and if I take a man prisoner—why, he ought, in common justice, to belong to me ; and I have a good right to let him go, if I think proper to do so. However Master Stickles said that I was quite benighted, and knew nothing of the Constitution ; which was the very thing I knew, beyond any man in our parish !

Nevertheless, it was not for me to contradict a commissioner ; and therefore I let my prisoners go, and wished them a happy deliverance. Stickles replied,

with a merry grin, that if they ever got it, it would be a jail deliverance, and the bliss of dancing ; and he laid his hand to his throat in a manner which seemed to me most uncourteous. However his foresight proved too correct ; for both those poor fellows were executed, soon after the next assizes. Lorna had done her very best to earn another chance for them ; even going down on her knees to that common Jeremy, and pleading with great tears for them. However, although much moved by her, he vowed that he durst do nothing else. To set them free was more than his own life was worth ; for all the country knew, by this time, that two captive Doones were roped to the cider-press at Plover's Barrows. Annie bound the broken arm of the one whom I had knocked down with the club, and I myself supported it ; and then she washed and rubbed with lard the face of the other poor fellow, which the torch had injured ; and I fetched back his collar-bone to the best of my ability. For before any surgeon could arrive, they were off with a well-armed escort. That day, we were re-inforced so strongly from the stations along the coast, even as far as Minehead, that we not only feared no further attack, but even talked of assaulting Glen Doone, without waiting for the train-bands. However I thought that it would be mean to take advantage of the enemy in the thick of the floods and confusion ; and several of the others thought so too, and did not like fighting in water. Therefore it was resolved to wait, and keep a watch upon the valley, and let the floods go down again.

CHAPTER XXII.

Now the business I had most at heart (as every one knows by this time) was to marry Lorna as soon as might be ; if she had no objection, and then to work the farm so well, as to nourish all our family. And herein I saw no difficulty ; for Annie would soon be off our hands, and somebody might come and take a fancy to little Lizzie (who was growing up very nicely now, though not so fine as Annie) ; moreover we were almost sure to have great store of hay and corn after so much snow, if there be any truth in the old saying,

“ A foot deep of rain
Will kill hay and grain ;
But three feet of snow
Will make them come mo.’ ”

And although it was too true that we had lost a many cattle, yet even so we had not lost money ; for the few remaining fetched such prices as were never known before. And though we grumbled with all our hearts ; and really believed, at one time, that starvation was upon us ; I doubt whether on the whole, we were not the

fatter, and the richer, and the wiser for that winter. And I might have said the happier, except for the sorrow which we felt at the failures among our neighbours. The Snowes lost every sheep they had, and nine out of ten horned cattle; and poor Jasper Kebby would have been forced to throw up the lease of his farm, and perhaps to go to prison, but for the help we gave him.

However, my dear mother would have it, that Lorna was too young, as yet, to think of being married: and indeed I myself was compelled to admit that her form was becoming more perfect and lovely; though I had not thought it possible. And another difficulty was, that as we had all been Protestants from the time of Queen Elizabeth, the maiden must be converted first, and taught to hate all Papists. Now Lorna had not the smallest idea of ever being converted. She said that she loved me truly, but wanted not to convert me; and if I loved her equally, why should I wish to convert her? With this I was tolerably content, not seeing so very much difference between a creed and a credo, and believing God to be our Father, in Latin as well as English. Moreover my darling knew but little of the Popish ways—whether excellent, or otherwise—inasmuch as the Doones, though they stole their houses, or at least the joiner's work, had never been tempted enough by the devil to steal either church or chapel.

Lorna came to our little church, when Parson Bowden reappeared after the snow was over; and she said that all was very nice, and very like what she had seen in the time of her Aunt Sabina, when they went

far away to the little chapel, with a shilling in their gloves. It made the tears come into her eyes, by the force of memory, when Parson Bowden did the things, not so gracefully nor so well, yet with pleasant imitation of her old Priest's sacred rites.

"He is a worthy man," she said, being used to talk in the service-time, and my mother was obliged to cough: "I like him very much indeed: but I wish he would let me put his things the right way on his shoulders."

Everybody in our parish, who could walk at all, or hire a boy and a wheelbarrow, ay and half the folk from Countisbury, Brendon, and even Lynmouth, was and were to be found that Sunday, in our little church of Oare. People who would not come anigh us, when the Doones were threatening with carbine and with firebrand, flocked in their very best clothes, to see a lady Doone go to church. Now all this came of that vile John Fry; I knew it as well as possible; his tongue was worse than the clacker of a charity-school bell, or the ladle in the frying-pan, when the bees are swarming.

However Lorna was not troubled; partly because of her natural dignity and gentleness; partly because she never dreamed that the people were come to look at her. But when we came to the Psalms of the day, with some vague sense of being stared at more than ought to be, she dropped the heavy black lace fringing of the velvet hat she wore, and concealed from the congregation all except her bright red lips, and the oval snowdrift of her chin. I touched her hand, and

she pressed mine ; and we felt that we were close together, and God saw no harm in it.

As for Parson Bowden (as worthy a man as ever lived, and one who could shoot flying) he scarcely knew what he was doing, without the clerk to help him. He had borne it very well indeed, when I returned from London ; but to see a live Doone in his church, and a lady Doone, and a lovely Doone, moreover one engaged to me, upon whom he almost looked as the Squire of his parish (although not rightly an Armiger) and to feel that this lovely Doone was a Papist, and therefore of higher religion—as all our parsons think—and that she knew exactly how he ought to do all the service, of which he himself knew little ; I wish to express my firm belief that all these things together turned Parson Bowden's head a little, and made him look to me for orders.

My mother, the very best of women, was (as I could well perceive) a little annoyed and vexed with things. For this particular occasion, she had procured from Dulverton, by special message to Ruth Huckaback (whereof more anon), a head-dress with a feather never seen before upon Exmoor, to the best of every one's knowledge. It came from a bird called a flaming something—a flaming oh, or a flaming ah, I will not be positive—but I can assure you that it did flame ; and dear mother had no other thought, but that all the congregation would neither see nor think of any other mortal thing, or immortal even, to the very end of the sermon.

Herein she was so disappointed, that no sooner did she get home, but upstairs she went at speed, not even stopping at the mirror in our little parlour, and flung the whole thing into a cupboard, as I knew by the bang of the door, having eased the lock for her lately. Lorna saw there was something wrong; and she looked at Annie and Lizzie (as more likely to understand it) with her former timid glance; which I knew so well, and which had first enslaved me.

“I know not what ails mother,” said Annie, who looked very beautiful, with lilac lutestring ribbons, which I saw the Snowe girls envying; “but she has not attended to one of the prayers, nor said ‘Amen,’ all the morning. Never fear, darling Lorna, it is nothing about you. It is something about our John, I am sure; for she never worries herself very much, about anybody but him.” And here Annie made a look at me, such as I had had five hundred of.

“You keep your opinions to yourself,” I replied; because I knew the dear, and her little bits of jealousy; “it happens that you are quite wrong, this time. Lorna, come with me, my darling.”

“Oh yes, Lorna; go with him;” cried Lizzie, dropping her lip, in a way which you must see to know its meaning; “John wants nobody now, but you; and none can find fault with his taste, dear.”

“You little fool, I should think not;” I answered very rudely; for, betwixt the lot of them, my Lorna’s eyelashes were quivering: “now dearest angel, come with me; and snap your hands at the whole of them.”

My angel did come, with a sigh, and then with a smile, when we were alone; but without any unangelick attempt at snapping her sweet white fingers.

These little things are enough to show that while every one so admired Lorna, and so kindly took to her, still there would, just now and then, be petty and paltry flashes of jealousy concerning her; and perhaps it could not be otherwise among so many women. However, we were always doubly kind to her afterwards; and although her mind was so sensitive and quick that she must have suffered, she never allowed us to perceive it, nor lowered herself by representing it.

Possibly I may have mentioned that little Ruth Huckaback had been asked, and had even promised to spend her Christmas with us; and this was the more desirable, because she had left us through some offence, or sorrow, about things said of her. Now my dear mother, being the kindest and best-hearted of all women, could not bear that poor dear Ruth (who would some day have such a fortune), should be entirely lost to us. "It is our duty, my dear children," she said more than once about it, "to forgive and forget, as freely as we hope to have it done to us. If dear little Ruth has not behaved quite as we might have expected, great allowance should be made for a girl with so much money. Designing people get hold of her, and flatter her, and coax her, to obtain a base influence over her; so that when she falls among simple folk, who speak the honest truth of

her, no wonder the poor child is vexed, and gives herself airs, and so on. Ruth can be very useful to us in a number of little ways ; and I consider it quite a duty to pardon her freak of petulance."

Now one of the little ways in which Ruth had been very useful, was the purchase of the scarlet feathers of the flaming bird ; and now that the house was quite safe from attack, and the mark on my forehead was healing, I was begged, over and over again, to go and see Ruth, and make all things straight, and pay for the gorgeous plumage. This last I was very desirous to do, that I might know the price of it, having made a small bet on the subject with Annie ; and having held counsel with myself, whether or not it were possible to get something of the kind for Lorna, of still more distinguished appearance. Of course she could not wear scarlet as yet, even if I had wished it ; but I believed that people of fashion often wore purple for mourning ; purple too was the royal colour, and Lorna was by right a queen ; therefore I was quite resolved to ransack Uncle Reuben's stores, in search of some bright purple bird, if nature had kindly provided one.

All this however I kept to myself, intending to trust Ruth Huckaback, and no one else, in the matter. And so, one beautiful Spring morning, when all the earth was kissed with scent, and all the air caressed with song, up the lane I stoutly rode, well armed, and well provided.

Now though it is part of my life to heed, it is no part of my tale to tell, how the wheat was coming on. I reckon that you, who read this story, after I am dead

and gone (and before that, none shall read it), will say, “Tush! What is his wheat to us? We are not wheat: we are human beings: and all we care for is human doings.” This may be very good argument and in the main, I believe that it is so. Nevertheless, if a man is to tell only what he thought and did, and not what came around him, he must not mention his own clothes, which his father and mother bought for him. And more than my own clothes to me, ay and as much as my own skin, are the works of nature round about, whereof a man is the smallest.

And now I will tell you, although most likely only to be laughed at, because I cannot put it in the style of Mr. Dryden—whom to compare to Shakespeare! but if once I begin upon that, you will never hear the last of me—nevertheless, I will tell you this; not wishing to be rude, but only just because I know it; the more a man can fling his arms (so to say), round nature’s neck, the more he can upon her bosom, like an infant, lie and suck,—the more that man shall earn the trust and love of all his fellow-men.

In this matter is no jealousy (when the man is dead); because thereafter all others know how much of the milk he had; and he can suck no longer; and they value him accordingly, for the nourishment he is to them. Even as when we keep a roaster of the sucking pigs, we choose, and praise at table most, the favourite of its mother. Fifty times have I seen this, and smiled, and praised our people’s taste, and offered them more of the vitals.

Now here am I upon Shakespeare (who died, of his own fruition, at the age of fifty-two, yet lived more than fifty thousand men, within his little span of life), when all the while I ought to be riding as hard as I can to Dulverton. But, to tell the truth, I could not ride hard, being held at every turn, and often without any turn at all, by the beauty of things around me. These things grow upon a man ; if once he stops to notice them.

It wanted yet two hours to noon, when I came to Master Huckaback's door, and struck the panels smartly. Knowing nothing of their manners, only that people in a town could not be expected to entertain (as we do in farm-houses), having, moreover, keen expectation of Master Huckaback's avarice, I had brought some stuff to eat, made by Annie, and packed by Lorna, and requiring no thinking about it.

Ruth herself came and let me in, blushing very heartily ; for which colour I praised her health, and my praises heightened it. That little thing had lovely eyes, and could be trusted thoroughly. I do like an obstinate little woman, when she is sure that she is right. And indeed if love had never sped me straight to the heart of Lorna (compared to whom, Ruth was no more than the thief is to the candle), who knows but what I might have yielded to the law of nature, that thorough trimmer of balances, and verified the proverb that the giant loves the dwarf?

“I take the privilege, Mistress Ruth, of saluting you according to kinship, and the ordering of the

Canons." And therewith I bussed her well, and put my arm around her waist, being so terribly restricted in the matter of Lorna, and knowing the use of practice. Not that I had any warmth—all that was darling Lorna's—only out of pure gallantry, and my knowledge of London fashions. Ruth blushed to such a pitch at this, and looked up at me with such a gleam, as if I must have my own way; that all my love of kissing sunk, and I felt that I was wronging her. Only my mother had told me, when the girls were out of the way, to do all I could to please darling Ruth, and I had gone about it accordingly.

Now Ruth as yet had never heard a word about dear Lorna; and when she led me into the kitchen (where everything looked beautiful), and told me not to mind, for a moment, about the scrubbing of my boots, because she would only be too glad to clean it all up after me, and told me how glad she was to see me, blushing more at every word, and recalling some of them, and stooping down for pots and pans, when I looked at her too ruddily—all these things came upon me so, without any legal notice, that I could only look at Ruth, and think how very good she was, and how bright her handles were; and wonder if I had wronged her. Once or twice, I began—this I say upon my honour—to endeavour to explain exactly, how we were at Plover's Barrows; how we all had been bound to fight, and had defeated the enemy, keeping their queen amongst us. But Ruth would make some great mistake between Lorna and Gwenny Carfax, and gave me

no chance to set her aright, and cared about nothing much, except some news of Sally Snowe.

What could I do with this little thing? All my sense of modesty, and value for my dinner, were against my over pressing all the graceful hints I had given about Lorna. Ruth was just a girl of that sort, who will not believe one word, except from her own seeing; not so much from any doubt, as from the practice of using eyes which have been in business.

I asked Cousin Ruth (as we used to call her, though the cousinship was distant) what was become of Uncle Ben, and how it was that we never heard anything of or from him now. She replied that she hardly knew what to make of her grandfather's manner of carrying on, for the last half year or more. He was apt to leave his home, she said, at any hour of the day or night; going none knew whither, and returning no one might say when. And his dress, in her opinion, was enough to frighten a hodman, or a scavenger of the roads, instead of the decent suit of kersey, or of Sabbath doeskins, such as had won the respect and reverence of his fellow-townsmen. But the worst of all things was, as she confessed with tears in her eyes, that the poor old gentleman had something weighing heavily on his mind.

“It will shorten his days, Cousin Ridd,” she said, for she never would call me Cousin John; “he has no enjoyment of anything that he eats or drinks, nor even in counting his money, as he used to do all Sunday; indeed no pleasure in anything, unless it be smoking

his pipe, and thinking, and staring at bits of brown stone, which he pulls, every now and then, out of his pockets. And the business, he used to take such pride in, is new left almost entirely to the foreman, and to me."

"And what will become of you, dear Ruth, if anything happens to the old man?"

"I am sure, I know not," she answered simply; "and I cannot bear to think of it. It must depend, I suppose, upon dear grandfather's pleasure about me."

"It must rather depend," said I, though having no business to say it, "upon your own good pleasure, Ruth; for all the world will pay court to you."

"That is the very thing which I never could endure. I have begged dear grandfather to leave no chance of that. When he has threatened me with poverty, as he does sometimes, I have always met him truly, with the answer, that I feared one thing a great deal worse than poverty; namely, to be an heiress. But I cannot make him believe it. Only think how strange, Cousin Ridd, I cannot make him believe it."

"It is not strange at all," I answered; "considering how he values money. Neither would any one else believe you, except by looking into your true, and very pretty eyes, dear."

Now I beg that no one will suspect for a single moment, either that I did not mean exactly what I said, or meant a single atom more, or would not have said the same, if Lorna had been standing by. What I had always liked in Ruth, was the calm straightforward gaze, and beauty of her large brown eyes.

Indeed I had spoken of them to Lorna, as the only ones to be compared (though not for more than a moment) to her own, for truth and light, but never for depth and softness. But now the little maiden dropped them, and turned away, without reply.

“I will go and see to my horse,” I said ; “the boy that has taken him seemed surprised at his having no horns on his forehead. Perhaps he will lead him into the shop, and feed him upon broadcloth.”

“Oh he is such a stupid boy,” Ruth answered, with great sympathy : “how quick of you to observe that now: and you call yourself ‘Slow John Ridd !’ I never did see such a stupid boy: sometimes he spoils my temper. But you must be back in half-an-hour, at the latest, Cousin Ridd. You see I remember what you are ; when once you get among horses, or cows, or things of that sort.”

“Things of that sort ! Well done, Ruth ! One would think you were quite a Cockney.”

Uncle Reuben did not come home to his dinner ; and his grand-daughter said she had strictest orders never to expect him. Therefore we had none to dine with us, except the foreman of the shop, a worthy man, named Thomas Cockram, fifty years of age or so. He seemed to me to have strong intentions of his own about little Ruth ; and on that account to regard me with a wholly undue malevolence. And perhaps, in order to justify him, I may have been more attentive to her, than otherwise need have been : at any rate Ruth and I were pleasant ; and he the very opposite.

“My dear Cousin Ruth,” I said, on purpose to vex Master Cockram, because he eyed us so heavily, and squinted so unluckily: “we have long been looking for you, at our Plover’s Barrows farm. You remember how you used to love hunting for eggs in the morning, and hiding up in the tallat with Lizzie, for me to seek you among the hay, when the sun was down. Ah, Master Cockram, those are the things young people find their pleasure in, not in selling a yard of serge, and giving twopence-halfpenny change, and writing ‘settled’ at the bottom, with a pencil that has blacked their teeth. Now, Master Cockram, you ought to come as far as our good farm, at once, and eat two new-laid eggs for breakfast, and be made to look quite young again. Our good Annie would cook for you; and you should have the hot new milk, and the pope’s eye from the mutton; and every foot of you would become a yard in about a fortnight.” And hereupon, I spread my chest, to show him an example. Ruth could not keep her countenance: but I saw that she thought it wrong of me; and would scold me, if ever I gave her the chance of taking those little liberties. However he deserved it all, according to my young ideas; for his great impertinence in aiming at my cousin.

But what I said was far less grievous to a man of honest mind, than little Ruth’s own behaviour. I could hardly have believed that so thoroughly true a girl, and one so proud and upright, could have got rid of any man, so cleverly as she got rid of Master Thomas Cockram. She gave him not even a glass of wine, but

commended to his notice, with a sweet and thoughtful gravity, some invoice which must be corrected, before her dear grandfather should return; and to amend which three great ledgers must be searched from first to last. Thomas Cockram winked at me, with the worst of his two wrong eyes; as much as to say, “I understand it; but I cannot help myself. Only you look out, if ever”—and before he had finished winking, the door was shut behind him. Then Ruth said to me in the simplest manner, “You have ridden far to-day, Cousin Ridd: and have far to ride to get home again. What will dear Aunt Ridd say, if we send you away without nourishment? All the keys are in my keeping, and dear grandfather has the finest wine, not to be matched in the west of England, as I have heard good judges say; though I know not wine from cider. Do you like the wine of Oporto, or the wine of Xeres?”

“I know not one from the other, fair cousin, except by the colour,” I answered: “but the sound of Oporto is nobler, and richer. Suppose we try wine of Oporto.”

The good little creature went and fetched a black bottle of an ancient cast, covered with dust and cobwebs. These I was anxious to shake aside; and indeed I thought that the wine would be better for being roused up a little. Ruth however would not hear a single word to that purport; and seeing that she knew more about it, I left her to manage it. And the result was very fine indeed, to wit a sparkling rosy liquor, dancing with little flakes of light, and scented like new violets. With this I was so pleased and gay, and Ruth so glad

to see me gay, that we quite forgot how the time went on; and though my fair cousin would not be persuaded to take a second glass herself, she kept on filling mine so fast that it was never empty, though I did my best to keep it so.

“What is a little drop like this to a man of your size and strength, Cousin Ridd?” she said, with her cheeks just brushed with rose, which made her look very beautiful: “I have heard you say that your head is so thick—or rather so clear, you ought to say—that no liquor ever moves it.”

“That is right enough,” I answered; “what a witch you must be, dear Ruth, to have remembered that now!”

“Oh, I remember every word, I have ever heard you say, Cousin Ridd; because your voice is so deep, you know, and you talk so little. Now it is useless to say ‘no.’ These bottles hold almost nothing. Dear grandfather will not come home, I fear, until long after you are gone. What will Aunt Ridd think of me, I am sure? You are all so dreadfully hospitable. Now not another ‘no,’ Cousin Ridd. We must have another bottle.”

“Well, must is must,” I answered, with a certain resignation. “I cannot bear bad manners, dear; and how old are you next birthday?”

“Eighteen, dear John;” said Ruth coming over, with the empty bottle; and I was pleased at her calling me “John,” and had a great mind to kiss her. However I thought of my Lorna suddenly, and of the anger

I should feel if a man went on with her so : therefore I lay back in my chair, to wait for the other bottle.

“ Do you remember how we danced, that night ? ” I asked, while she was opening it ; “ and how you were afraid of me first, because I looked so tall, dear ? ”

“ Yes, and so very broad, Cousin Ridd. I thought that you would eat me. But I have come to know, since then, how very kind and good you are.”

“ And will you come and dance again, at my wedding, Cousin Ruth ? ”

She nearly let the bottle fall, the last of which she was sloping carefully into a vessel of bright glass ; and then she raised her hand again, and finished it judiciously. And after that, she took the window, to see that all her work was clear ; and then she poured me out a glass, and said with very pale cheeks, but else no sign of meaning about her ; “ What did you ask me, Cousin Ridd ? ”

“ Nothing of any importance, Ruth : only we are so fond of you. I mean to be married as soon as I can. Will you come and help us ? ”

“ To be sure, I will, Cousin Ridd—unless, unless, dear grandfather cannot spare me from the business.” She went away ; and her breast was heaving, like a rick of under-carried hay. And she stood at the window long, trying to make yawns of sighs.

For my part, I knew not what to do. And yet I could think about it, as I never could with Lorna ; with whom I was always in a whirl, from the power of my love. So I thought some time about it ; and per-

ceived that it was the manliest way, just to tell her everything ; except that I feared she liked me. But it seemed to me unaccountable, that she did not even ask the name of my intended wife. Perhaps she thought that it must be Sally ; or perhaps she feared to trust her voice.

“ Come and sit by me, dear Ruth ; and listen to a long long story, how things have come about with me.”

“ No, thank you, Cousin Ridd,” she answered ; “ at least I mean that I shall be happy—that I shall be ready to hear you—to listen to you, I mean of course. But I would rather stay where I am, and have the air —or rather be able to watch for dear grandfather coming home. He is so kind and good to me. What should I do without him ? ”

Then I told her how, for years and years, I had been attached to Lorna, and all the dangers and difficulties which had so long beset us, and how I hoped that these were passing, and no other might come between us, except on the score of religion ; upon which point I trusted soon to overcome my mother’s objections. And then I told her how poor, and helpless, and alone in the world, my Lorna was ; and how sad all her youth had been, until I brought her away at last. And many other little things I mentioned, which there is no need for me again to dwell upon. Ruth heard it all without a word, and without once looking at me ; and only by her attitude could I guess that she was weeping. Then when all my tale was told, she asked in a low and gentle voice, but still without showing her face to me,

"And does she love you, Cousin Ridd? Does she say that she loves you, with—with all her heart?"

"Certainly, she does:" I answered. "Do you think it impossible for one like her to do so?"

She said no more; but crossed the room before I had time to look at her, and came behind my chair, and kissed me gently on the forehead.

"I hope you may be very happy, with—I mean in your new life," she whispered very softly; "as happy as you deserve to be, and as happy as you can make others be. Now how I have been neglecting you! I am quite ashamed of myself for thinking only of grandfather: and it makes me so low-spirited. You have told me a very nice romance, and I have never even helped you to a glass of wine. Here, pour it for yourself, dear cousin; I shall be back again directly."

With that, she was out of the door in a moment: and when she came back, you would not have thought that a tear had dimmed those large bright eyes, or wandered down those pale clear cheeks. Only her hands were cold and trembling: and she made me help myself.

Uncle Reuben did not appear at all; and Ruth who had promised to come and see us, and stay for a fortnight at our house (if her grandfather could spare her) now discovered, before I left, that she must not think of doing so. Perhaps she was right in deciding thus; at any rate it had now become improper for me to press her. And yet I now desired tenfold that she should consent to come, thinking that Lorna

herself would work the speediest cure of her passing whim.

For such, I tried to persuade myself, was the nature of Ruth's regard for me: and upon looking back I could not charge myself with any misconduct towards the little maiden. I had never sought her company, I had never trifled with her (at least until that very day), and being so engrossed with my own love, I had scarcely ever thought of her. And the maiden would never have thought of me, except as a clumsy yokel, but for my mother's and sister's meddling, and their wily suggestions. I believe they had told the little soul, that I was deeply in love with her; although they both stoutly denied it. But who can place trust in a woman's word, when it comes to a question of match-making?

CHAPTER XXIII.

Now while I was riding home that evening, with a tender conscience about Ruth, although not a wounded one, I guessed but little that all my thoughts were needed much for my own affairs. So however it proved to be; for as I came in, soon after dark, my sister Eliza met me at the corner of the cheese-room, and she said, "Don't go in there, John," pointing to mother's room; "until I have had a talk with you."

"In the name of Moses," I inquired, having picked up that phrase at Dulverton; "what are you at about me now? There is no peace for a quiet fellow."

"It is nothing we are at," she answered; "neither may you make light of it. It is something very important about Mistress Lorna Doone."

"Let us have it at once;" I cried: "I can bear anything about Lorna, except that she does not care for me."

"It has nothing to do with that, John. And I am quite sure that you never need fear anything of that sort. She perfectly wearies me sometimes, although

her voice is so soft and sweet, about your endless perfections."

"Bless her little heart!" I said: "the subject is inexhaustible."

"No doubt!" replied Lizzie, in the driest manner; "especially to your sisters. However this is no time to joke. I fear you will get the worst of it, John. Do you know a man of about Gwenny's shape, nearly as broad as he is long, but about six times the size of Gwenny, and with a length of snow-white hair, and a thickness also; as the copses were last winter. He never can comb it, that is quite certain, with any comb yet invented."

"Then you go and offer your services. There are few things you cannot scarify. I know the man from your description, although I have never seen him. Now where is my Lorna?"

"Your Lorna is with Annie, having a good cry, I believe; and Annie too glad to second her. She knows that this great man is here, and knows that he wants to see her. But she begged to defer the interview, until dear John's return."

"What a nasty way you have of telling the very commonest piece of news!" I said, on purpose to pay her out. "What man will ever fancy you, you unlucky little snapper? Now, no more nursery talk for me. I will go and settle this business. You had better go and dress your dolls; if you can give them clothes unpoisoned." Hereupon Lizzie burst into a perfect roar of tears; feeling that she had the worst of it. And I

took her up, and begged her pardon ; although she scarcely deserved it : for she knew that I was out of luck, and she might have spared her satire.

I was almost sure that the man who was come must be the Counsellor himself ; of whom I felt much keener fear than of his son Carver. And knowing that his visit boded ill to me and Lorna, I went and sought my dear ; and led her with a heavy heart, from the maiden's room to mother's, to meet our dreadful visitor.

Mother was standing by the door, making courtesies now and then, and listening to a long harangue upon the rights of state and land, which the Counsellor (having found that she was the owner of her property, and knew nothing of her title to it) was encouraged to deliver. My dear mother stood gazing at him, spell-bound by his eloquence, and only hoping that he would stop. He was shaking his hair upon his shoulders, in the power of his words, and his wrath at some little thing, which he declared to be quite illegal.

Then I ventured to show myself, in the flesh, before him ; although he feigned not to see me : but he advanced with zeal to Lorna ; holding out both hands at once.

“ My darling child, my dearest niece ; how wonderfully well you look ! Mistress Ridd, I give you credit. This is the country of good things. I never would have believed our Queen could have looked so Royal. Surely of all virtues, hospitality is the finest, and the most romantic. Dearest Lorna, kiss your uncle ; it is quite a privilege.”

“Perhaps it is to you, sir ;” said Lorna, who could never quite check her sense of oddity ; “ but I fear that you have smoked tobacco, which spoils reciprocity.”

“ You are right, my child. How keen your scent is ! It is always so with us. Your grandfather was noted for his olfactory powers. Ah, a great loss, dear Mrs. Ridd, a terrible loss to this neighbourhood ! As one of our great writers says—I think it must be Milton—‘ We ne’er shall look upon his like again.’ ”

“ With your good leave, sir,” I broke in ; “ Master Milton could never have written so sweet and simple a line as that. It is one of the great Shakespeare.”

“ Woe is me for my neglect ! ” said the Counsellor, bowing airily ; “ this must be your son, Mistress Ridd, the great John, the wrestler. And one who meddles with the Muses ! Ah, since I was young, how everything is changed, madam ! Except indeed the beauty of women, which seems to me to increase every year.” Here the old villain bowed to my mother ; and she blushed, and made another courtesy, and really did look very nice.

“ Now though I have quoted the poets amiss, as your son informs me (for which I tender my best thanks, and must amend my reading), I can hardly be wrong in assuming that this young armiger must be the too attractive cynosure to our poor little maiden. And for my part, she is welcome to him. I have never been one of those who dwell upon distinctions of rank, and birth, and such like ; as if they were in the heart of nature, and must be eternal. In early youth, I may

have thought so, and been full of that little pride. But now I have long accounted it one of the first axioms of political œconomy—you are following me, Mistress Ridd?"

"Well, sir, I am doing my best; but I cannot quite keep up with you."

"Never mind, madam; I will be slower. But your son's intelligence is so quick"—

"I see, sir; you thought that mine must be. But no; it all comes from his father, sir. His father was that quick and clever"—

"Ah, I can well suppose it, madam. And a credit he is to both of you. Now, to return to our buttons—a figure which you will appreciate—I may now be regarded, I think, as this young lady's legal guardian; although I have not had the honour of being formally appointed such. Her father was the eldest son of Sir Ensor Doone; and I happened to be the second son; and as young maidens cannot be baronets, I suppose I am 'Sir Counsellor.' Is it so, Mistress Ridd, according to your theory of genealogy?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir;" my mother answered carefully: "I know not anything of that name, sir, except in the gospel of Matthew: but I see not why it should be otherwise."

"Good, madam! I may look upon that as your sanction and approval: and the college of heralds shall hear of it. And in return, as Lorna's guardian, I give my full and ready consent to her marriage with your son, madam."

“ Oh how good of you, sir, how kind ! Well, I always did say, that the learnedest people were, almost always, the best and kindest, and the most simple-hearted.”

“ Madam, that is a great sentiment. What a goodly couple they will be ! and if we can add him to our strength ”—

“ Oh no, sir, oh no ! ” cried mother : “ you really must not think of it. He has always been brought up so honest ”—

“ Hem ! that makes a difference. A decided disqualification for domestic life among the Doones. But, surely, he might get over those prejudices, madam ? ”

“ Oh no, sir ! he never can : he never can indeed. When he was only that high, sir, he could not steal even an apple, when some wicked boys tried to mislead him.”

“ Ah ! ” replied the Counsellor, shaking his white head gravely ; “ then I greatly fear that his case is quite incurable. I have known such cases ; violent prejudice, bred entirely of education, and anti-œconomical to the last degree. And when it is so ; it is desperate : no man, after imbibing ideas of that sort, can in any way be useful.”

“ Oh yes, sir, John is very useful. He can do as much work as three other men ; and you should see him load a sledd, sir.”

“ I was speaking, madam, of higher usefulness,— power of the brain and heart. The main thing for us upon earth, is to take a large view of things. But while we talk of the heart, what is my niece Lorna doing, that she does not come and thank me, for my

perhaps too prompt concession to her youthful fancies? Ah, if I had wanted thanks, I should have been more stubborn."

Lorna, being challenged thus, came up and looked at her uncle, with her noble eyes fixed full upon his, which beneath his white eyebrows glistened, like dormer windows piled with snow.

"For what am I to thank you, uncle?"

"My dear niece, I have told you. For removing the heaviest obstacle, which to a mind so well regulated could possibly have existed, between your dutiful self and the object of your affections."

"Well, uncle, I should be very grateful, if I thought that you did so, from love of me; or if I did not know that you have something yet concealed from me."

"And my consent," said the Counsellor, "is the more meritorious, the more liberal, frank, and candid, in the face of an existing fact, and a very clearly established one; which might have appeared to weaker minds in the light of an impediment; but to my loftier view of matrimony seems quite a recommendation."

"What fact do you mean, sir? Is it one that I ought to know?"

"In my opinion it is, good niece. It forms, to my mind, so fine a basis for the invariable harmony of the matrimonial state. To be brief—as I always endeavour to be, without becoming obscure—you two young people (ah, what a gift is youth! one can never be too thankful for it) you will have the rare advantage of commencing married life, with a subject of common

interest to discuss, whenever you weary of—well, say of one another; if you can now, by any means, conceive such a possibility. And perfect justice meted out: mutual good-will resulting, from the sense of reciprocity."

"I do not understand you, sir. Why can you not say what you mean, at once?"

"My dear child, I prolong your suspense. Curiosity is the most powerful of all feminine instincts; and therefore the most delightful, when not prematurely satisfied. However, if you must have my strong realities, here they are. Your father slew dear John's father, and dear John's father slew yours."

Having said thus much, the Counsellor leaned back upon his chair, and shaded his calm white-bearded eyes from the rays of our tallow candles. He was a man who liked to look, rather than to be looked at. But Lorna came to me for aid; and I went up to Lorna; and mother looked at both of us.

Then feeling that I must speak first (as no one would begin it), I took my darling round the waist, and led her up to the Counsellor; while she tried to bear it bravely; yet must lean on me; or did.

"Now, Sir Counsellor Doone," I said, with Lorna squeezing both my hands, I never yet knew how, (considering that she was walking all the time, or something like it); "you know right well, Sir Counsellor, that Sir Ensor Doone gave approval." I cannot tell what made me think of this: but so it came upon me.

“ Approval to what, good rustic John? To the slaughter so reciprocal?”

“ No, sir, not to that; even if it ever happened; which I do not believe. But to the love betwixt me and Lorna; which your story shall not break, without more evidence than your word. And even so, shall never break; if Lorna thinks as I do.”

The maiden gave me a little touch, as much as to say, “you are right, darling: give it to him, again, like that.” However, I held my peace, well knowing that too many words do mischief.

Then mother looked at me with wonder, being herself too amazed to speak: and the Counsellor looked, with great wrath in his eyes, which he tried to keep from burning.

“ How say you then, John Ridd,” he cried, stretching out one hand, like Elijah; “is this a thing of the sort you love? Is this what you are used to?”

“ So please your worship,” I answered; “no kind of violence can surprise us, since first came Doones upon Exmoor. Up to that time, none heard of harm; except of taking a purse, may be, or cutting a strange sheep’s throat. And the poor folk who did this were hanged, with some benefit of clergy. But ever since the Doones came first, we are used to anything.”

“ Thou varlet,” cried the Counsellor, with the colour of his eyes quite changed with the sparkles of his fury: “is this the way we are to deal with such a low-bred clod as thou? To question the doings of our people, and to talk of clergy! What, dream you not that we

could have clergy, and of the right sort too, if only we cared to have them? Tush! Am I to spend my time, arguing with a plough-tail Bob?"

"If your worship will hearken to me," I answered very modestly, not wishing to speak harshly, with Lorna looking up at me; "there are many things that might be said, without any kind of argument, which I would never wish to try with one of your worship's learning. And in the first place it seems to me that if our fathers hated so one another bitterly, yet neither won the victory, only mutual discomfiture; surely that is but a reason why we should be wiser than they, and make it up in this generation by goodwill and loving" —

"Oh John, you wiser than your father!" mother broke upon me here: "not but what you might be as wise, when you come to be old enough."

"Young people of the present age," said the Counsellor severely; "have no right feeling of any sort, upon the simplest matter. Lorna Doone, stand forth from contact with that heir of parricide; and state in your own mellifluous voice, whether you regard this slaughter as a pleasant trifle."

"You know, without any words of mine," she answered very softly, yet not withdrawing from my hand, "that although I have been seasoned well to every kind of outrage, among my gentle relatives, I have not yet so purely lost all sense of right and wrong as to receive what you have said, as lightly as you declared it. You think it a happy basis for our

future concord. I do not quite think that, my uncle ; neither do I quite believe that a word of it is true. In our happy valley, nine-tenths of what is said is false ; and you were always wont to argue that true and false are but a blind turned upon a pivot. Without any failure of respect for your character, good uncle, I decline politely to believe a word of what you have told me. And even if it were proved to me ; all I can say is this, if my John will have me, I am his for ever.”

This long speech was too much for her ; she had over-rated her strength about it, and the sustenance of irony. So at last she fell into my arms, which had long been waiting for her ; and there she lay with no other sound, except a gurgling in her throat.

“ You old villain,” cried my mother, shaking her fist at the Counsellor, while I could do nothing else but hold, and bend across, my darling, and whisper to deaf ears ; “ What is the good of the quality ; if this is all that comes of it ? Out of the way ! You know the words that make the deadly mischief ; but not the ways that heal them. Give me that bottle, if hands you have ; what is the use of Counsellors ? ”

I saw that dear mother was carried away ; and indeed I myself was something like it ; with the pale face upon my bosom, and the heaving of the heart, and the heat and cold all through me, as my darling breathed or lay. Meanwhile the Counsellor stood back, and seemed a little sorry ; although of course it was not in his power to be at all ashamed of himself.

“ My sweet love, my darling child,” our mother

went on to Lorna, in a way that I shall never forget, though I live to be a hundred ; “pretty pet, not a word of it is true, upon that old liar’s oath : and if every word were true, poor chick, you should have our John all the more for it. You and John were made by God and meant for one another, whatever falls between you. Little lamb, look up and speak : here is your own John and I ; and the devil take the Counsellor.”

I was amazed at mother’s words, being so unlike her ; while I loved her all the more because she forgot herself so. In another moment in ran Annie, ay and Lizzie also, knowing by some mystic sense (which I have often noticed, but never could explain) that something was astir, belonging to the world of women, yet foreign to the eyes of men. And now the Counsellor, being well-born, although such a heartless miscreant, beckoned to me to come away ; which I, being smothered with women, was only too glad to do, as soon as my own love would let go of me.

“That is the worst of them,” said the old man ; when I had led him into our kitchen, with an apology at every step, and given him hot schnapps and water, and a cigarro of brave Tom Faggus : “you never can say much, sir, in the way of reasoning (however gently meant and put) but what these women will fly out. It is wiser to put a wild bird in a cage, and expect him to sit and look at you, and chirp without a feather rumpled, than it is to expect a woman to answer reason reasonably.” Saying this, he looked at his puff of smoke as if it contained more reason.

“I am sure I do not know, sir,” I answered according to a phrase which has always been my favourite, on account of its general truth: moreover he was now our guest, and had right to be treated accordingly: “I am, as you see, not acquainted with the ways of women; except my mother and sisters.”

“Except not even them, my son,” said the Counsellor, now having finished his glass, without much consultation about it; “if you once understand your mother, and sisters—why you understand the lot of them.”

He made a twist in his cloud of smoke, and dashed his finger through it, so that I could not follow his meaning; and in manners, liked not to press him.

“Now of this business, John,” he said, after getting to the bottom of the second glass, and having a trifle or so to eat, and praising our chimney-corner; “taking you on the whole, you know you are wonderfully good people; and instead of giving me up to the soldiers, as you might have done, you are doing your best to make me drunk.”

“Not at all, sir,” I answered; “not at all, your worship. Let me mix you another glass. We rarely have a great gentleman by the side of our embers and oven. I only beg your pardon, sir, that my sister Annie (who knows where to find all the good pans and the lard) could not wait upon you, this evening; and I fear they have done it with dripping, instead, and in a pan with the bottom burned. But old Betty quite loses her head sometimes, by dint of over-scolding.”

“My son,” replied the Counsellor, standing across

the front of the fire, to prove his strict sobriety : “ I meant to come down upon you to-night ; but you have turned the tables upon me. Not through any skill on your part, nor through any paltry weakness as to love (and all that stuff, which boys and girls spin tops at, or knock dolls’ noses together), but through your simple way of taking me, as a man to be believed ; combined with the comfort of this place, and the choice tobacco and cordials. I have not enjoyed an evening so much : God bless me if I know when ! ”

“ Your worship,” said I, “ makes me more proud than I well know what to do with. Of all the things that please and lead us into happy sleep at night, the first and chiefest is to think that we have pleased a visitor.”

“ Then, John, thou hast deserved good sleep ; for I am not pleased easily. But although our family is not so high now as it hath been, I have enough of the gentleman left, to be pleased when good people try me. My father, Sir Ensor, was better than I, in this great element of birth, and my son Carver is far worse. *Ætas parentum, what is it, my boy?* I hear that you have been at a grammar-school.”

“ So I have, your worship ; and at a very good one ; but I only got far enough to make more tail than head of Latin.”

“ Let that pass,” said the Counsellor : “ John, thou art all the wiser.” And the old man shook his hoary locks, as if Latin had been his ruin. I looked at him sadly, and wondered whether it might have so ruined me, but for God’s mercy in stopping it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT night, the reverend Counsellor, not being in such state of mind as ought to go alone, kindly took our best old bedstead, carved in panels, well enough, with the woman of Samaria. I set him up, both straight and heavy, so that he need but close both eyes, and keep his mouth just open ; and in the morning he was thankful for all that he could remember.

I, for my part, scarcely knew whether he really had begun to feel good-will towards us, and to see that nothing else could be of any use to him ; or whether he was merely acting, so as to deceive us. And it had struck me, several times, that he had made a great deal more of the spirit he had taken, than the quantity would warrant, with a man so wise and solid. Neither did I quite understand a little story which Lorna told me, how that in the night awaking, she had heard, or seemed to hear, a sound of feeling in her room ; as if there had been some one groping carefully among the things within her drawers or wardrobe-closet. But the

noise had ceased at once, she said, when she sat up in bed and listened ; and knowing how many mice we had, she took courage and fell asleep again.

After breakfast, the Counsellor (who looked no whit the worse for schnapps, but even more grave and venerable), followed our Annie into the dairy, to see how we managed the clotted cream, of which he had eaten a basinful. And thereupon they talked a little ; and Annie thought him a fine old gentleman, and a very just one ; for he had nobly condemned the people who spoke against Tom Faggus.

“ Your honour must plainly understand,” said Annie, being now alone with him, and spreading out her light quick hands over the pans, like butterflies, “ that they are brought in here to cool, after being set in the basin-holes, with the wood-ash under them, which I showed you in the back-kitchen. And they must have very little heat, not enough to simmer even ; only just to make the bubbles rise, and the scum upon the top set thick : and after that, it clots as firm,—oh, as firm as my two hands be.”

“ Have you ever heard,” asked the Counsellor, who enjoyed this talk with Annie ; “ that if you pass across the top, without breaking the surface, a string of beads, or polished glass, or anything of that kind, the cream will set three times as solid, and in thrice the quantity ? ”

“ No, sir ; I have never heard that,” said Annie, staring with all her simple eyes ; “ what a thing it is to read books, and grow learned ! But it is very easy

to try it: I will get my coral-necklace; it will not be witchcraft, will it, sir?"

"Certainly not," the old man replied: "I will make the experiment myself; and you may trust me not to be hurt, my dear. But coral will not do, my child, neither will anything coloured. The beads must be of plain common glass; but the brighter they are the better."

"Then I know the very thing," cried Annie; "as bright as bright can be, and without any colour in it, except in the sun or candlelight. Dearest Lorna has the very thing, a necklace of some old glass-beads, or I think they called them jewels: she will be too glad to lend it to us. I will go for it, in a moment."

"My dear, it cannot be half so bright as your own pretty eyes. But remember one thing, Annie, you must not say what it is for; or even that I am going to use it, or anything at all about it; else the charm will be broken. Bring it here, without a word; if you know where she keeps it."

"To be sure I do," she answered; "John used to keep it for her. But she took it away from him last week, and she wore it when—I mean when somebody was here; and he said it was very valuable, and spoke with great learning about it, and called it by some particular name, which I forgot at this moment. But valuable, or not, we cannot hurt it, can we, sir, by passing it over the cream-pan?"

"Hurt it!" cried the Counsellor: "nay, we shall do it good, my dear. It will help to raise the cream: and you may take my word for it, young maiden, none

can do good in this world, without in turn receiving it.” Pronouncing this great sentiment, he looked so grand and benevolent, that Annie (as she said afterwards) could scarce forbear from kissing him, yet feared to take the liberty. Therefore, she only ran away to fetch my Lorna’s necklace.

Now as luck would have it—whether good luck, or otherwise, you must not judge too hastily,—my darling had taken it into her head, only a day or two before, that I was far too valuable to be trusted with her necklace. Now that she had some idea of its price and quality, she had begun to fear that some one, perhaps even Squire Faggus (in whom her faith was illiberal), might form designs against my health, to win the bauble from me. So, with many pretty coaxings, she had led me to give it up; which, except for her own sake, I was glad enough to do, misliking a charge of such importance.

Therefore Annie found it sparkling in the little secret hole, near the head of Lorna’s bed, which she herself had recommended for its safer custody; and without a word to any one, she brought it down, and danced it in the air before the Counsellor, for him to admire its lustre.

“Oh, that old thing!” said the gentleman, in a tone of some contempt; “I remember that old thing well enough. However, for want of a better, no doubt it will answer our purpose. Three times three, I pass it over. Crinkleum, crankum, grass and clover! What are you feared of, you silly child?”

“Good sir, it is perfect witchcraft! I am sure of that, because it rhymes. Oh, what would mother say to me? Shall I ever go to heaven again? Oh, I see the cream already!”

“To be sure you do: but you must not look, or the whole charm will be broken, and the devil will fly away with the pan, and drown every cow you have got in it.”

“Oh, sir, it is too horrible. How could you lead me to such a sin? Away with thee, witch of Endor!”

For the door began to creak, and a broom appeared suddenly in the opening, with our Betty, no doubt, behind it. But Annie, in the greatest terror, slammed the door, and bolted it, and then turned again to the Counsellor; yet looking at his face, had not the courage to reproach him. For his eyes rolled, like two blazing barrels, and his white shagg'd brows were knit across them, and his forehead scowled in black furrows, so that Annie said that if she ever saw the devil, she saw him then, and no mistake. Whether the old man wished to scare her, or whether he was trying not to laugh, is more than I can tell you.

“Now,” he said, in a deep stern whisper; “not a word of this to living soul: neither must you, nor any other, enter this place for three hours at least. By that time the charm will have done its work: the pan will be cream to the bottom; and you will bless me for a secret which will make your fortune. Put the bauble under this pannikin; which none must lift for a day and a night. Have no fear, my simple wench; not a

breath of harm shall come to you ; if you obey my orders.”

“ Oh that I will, sir, that I will : if you only tell me what to do.”

“ Go to your room, without so much as a single word to any one. Bolt yourself in, and for three hours now, read the Lord’s Prayer backwards.”

Poor Annie was only too glad to escape, upon these conditions ; and the Counsellor kissed her upon the forehead, and told her not to make her eyes red, because they were much too sweet and pretty. She dropped them at this, with a sob and a courtesy, and ran away to her bedroom : but as for reading the Lord’s Prayer backwards, that was much beyond her ; and she had not done three words quite right, before the three hours expired.

Meanwhile the Counsellor was gone. He bade our mother adieu, with so much dignity of bearing, and such warmth of gratitude, and the high-bred courtesy of the old school (now fast disappearing), that when he was gone, dear mother fell back on the chair which he had used last night ; as if it would teach her the graces. And for more than an hour, she made believe not to know what there was for dinner.

“ Oh the wickedness of the world ! Oh the lies that are told of people—or rather I mean the falsehoods—because a man is better born, and has better manners ! Why, Lorna, how is it that you never speak about your charming uncle ? Did you notice, Lizzie, how his silver hair was waving upon his velvet collar, and how

white his hands were, and every nail like an acorn ; only pink like shell-fish, or at least like shells ? And the way he bowed, and dropped his eyes, from his pure respect for me ! And then, that he would not even speak, on account of his emotion ; but pressed my hand in silence ! Oh Lizzie, you have read me beautiful things about Sir Gallyhead, and the rest ; but nothing to equal Sir Counsellor."

" You had better marry him, madam," said I, coming in very sternly ; though I knew I ought not to say it : " he can repay your adoration. He has stolen a hundred thousand pounds."

" John," cried my mother, " you are mad ! " And yet she turned as pale as death ; for women are so quick at turning ; and she inkled what it was.

" Of course, I am, mother ; mad about the marvels of Sir Galahad. He has gone off with my Lorna's necklace. Fifty farms like ours can never make it good to Lorna."

Hereupon ensued grim silence. Mother looked at Lizzie's face, for she could not look at me ; and Lizzie looked at me, to know : and as for me, I could have stamped almost on the heart of any one. It was not the value of the necklace—I am not so low a hound as that—nor was it even the damned folly shown by every one of us—it was the thought of Lorna's sorrow for her ancient plaything ; and even more, my fury at the breach of hospitality.

But Lorna came up to me softly, as a woman should always come ; and she laid one hand upon my shoulder ;

and she only looked at me. She even seemed to fear to look, and dropped her eyes, and sighed at me. Without a word, I knew by that, how I must have looked like Satan; and the evil spirit left my heart; when she had made me think of it.

“ Darling John, did you want me to think that you cared for my money, more than for me ? ”

I led her away from the rest of them, being desirous of explaining things, when I saw the depth of her nature opened, like an everlasting well, to me. But she would not let me say a word, or do anything by ourselves, as it were : she said, “ Your duty is to your mother : this blow is on her, and not on me.”

I saw that she was right ; though how she knew it is beyond me : and I asked her just to go in front, and bring my mother round a little. For I must let my passion pass : it may drop its weapons quickly ; but it cannot come and go, before a man has time to think.

Then Lorna went up to my mother, who was still in the chair of elegance ; and she took her by both hands, and said,

“ Dearest mother, I shall fret so, if I see you fretting. And to fret will kill me, mother. They have always told me so.”

Poor mother bent on Lorna’s shoulder, without thought of attitude ; and laid her cheek on Lorna’s breast, and sobbed till Lizzie was jealous, and came with two pocket-handkerchiefs. As for me, my heart was lighter (if they would only dry their eyes, and come round by dinner-time) than it had been since the day on

which Tom Faggus discovered the value of that blessed and cursed necklace. None could say that I wanted Lorna for her money now. And perhaps the Doones would let me have her; now that her property was gone.

But who shall tell of Annie's grief? The poor little thing would have staked her life upon finding the trinket, in all its beauty, lying under the pannikin. She proudly challenged me to lift it—which I had done, long ere that, of course—if only I would take the risk of the spell for my incredulity. I told her not to talk of spells, until she could spell a word backwards; and then to look into the pan where the charmed cream should be. She would not acknowledge that the cream was the same as all the rest was; and indeed it was not quite the same, for the points of poor Lorna's diamonds had made a few star-rays across the rich firm crust of yellow.

But when we raised the pannikin, and there was nothing under it, poor Annie fell against the wall, which had been whitened lately; and her face put all the white to scorn. My love, who was as fond of her, as if she had known her for fifty years, hereupon ran up and caught her, and abused all diamonds. I will dwell no more upon Annie's grief, because we felt it all so much. But I could not help telling her, if she wanted a witch, to seek good Mother Meldrum, a legitimate performer.

That same night Master Jeremy Stickles (of whose absence the Counsellor must have known) came back, with all equipment ready for the grand attack. Now

the Doones knew, quite as well as we did, that this attack was threatening ; and that but for the wonderful weather it would have been made long ago. Therefore we, or at least our people (for I was doubtful about going), were sure to meet with a good resistance, and due preparation.

It was very strange to hear and see, and quite impossible to account for, that now some hundreds of country people (who feared to whisper so much as a word against the Doones a year ago, and would sooner have thought of attacking a church, in service-time, than Glen Doone) now sharpened their old cutlasses, and laid pitchforks on the grindstone, and bragged at every village-cross, as if each would kill ten Doones himself, neither care to wipe his hands afterwards. And this fierce bravery, and tall contempt, had been growing ever since the news of the attack upon our premises had taken good people by surprise ; at least as concerned the issue.

Jeremy Stickles laughed heartily about Annie's new manner of charming the cream ; but he looked very grave at the loss of the jewels, so soon as he knew their value.

“ My son,” he exclaimed, “ this is very heavy. It will go ill with all of you to make good this loss, as I fear that you will have to do.”

“ What ! ” cried I, with my blood running cold. “ We make good the loss, Master Stickles ! Every farthing we have in the world, and the labour of our lives to boot, will never make good the tenth of it.”

“It would cut me to the heart,” he answered, laying his hand on mine; “to hear of such a deadly blow to you and your good mother. And this farm; how long, John, has it been in your family?”

“For at least six hundred years,” I said, with a foolish pride that was only too like to end in groans; “and some people say, by a Royal grant, in the time of the great King Alfred. At any rate, a Ridd was with him throughout all his hiding-time. We have always held by the King and crown: surely none will turn us out, unless we are guilty of treason?”

“My son,” replied Jeremy very gently, so that I could love him for it; “not a word to your good mother of this unlucky matter. Keep it to yourself, my boy, and try to think but little of it. After all, I may be wrong: at any rate, least said best mended.”

“But Jeremy, dear Jeremy, how can I bear to leave it so? Do you suppose that I can sleep, and eat my food, and go about, and look at other people, as if nothing at all had happened? And all the time have it on my mind, that not an acre of all the land, nor even our old sheep-dog, belongs to us, of right at all! It is more than I can do, Jeremy. Let me talk, and know the worst of it.”

“Very well,” replied Master Stickles, seeing that both the doors were closed; “I thought that nothing could move you, John; or I never would have told you. Likely enough I am quite wrong; and God send that I be so. But what I guessed at some time back seems more than a guess, now that you have told me

about these wondrous jewels. Now will you keep, as close as death, every word I tell you?"

"By the honour of a man, I will. Until you yourself release me."

"That is quite enough, John. From you, I want no oath ; which, according to my experience, tempts a bad man to lie the more, by making it more important. I know you now too well to swear you, though I have the power. Now, my lad, what I have to say will scare your mind in one way, and ease it in another. I think that you have been hard pressed—I can read you like a book, John—by something which that old villain said, before he stole the necklace. You have tried not to dwell upon it ; you have even tried to make light of it for the sake of the women : but on the whole it has grieved you more, than even this dastard robbery."

"It would have done so, Jeremy Stickles, if I could once have believed it. And even without much belief, it is so against our manners, that it makes me miserable. Only think of loving Lorna, only think of kissing her ; and then remembering that her father had destroyed the life of mine !"

"Only think," said Master Stickles, imitating my very voice, "of Lorna loving you, John, of Lorna kissing you, John ; and all the while saying to herself, 'this man's father murdered mine.' Now look at it in Lorna's way, as well as in your own way. How one-sided all men are !"

"I may look at it in fifty ways, and yet no good will

come of it. Jeremy, I confess to you, that I tried to make the best of it; partly to baffle the Counsellor; and partly because my darling needed my help, and bore it so, and behaved to me so nobly. But to you in secret, I am not ashamed to say that a woman may look over this, easier than a man may."

"Because her nature is larger, my son, when she truly loves; although her mind be smaller. Now, if I can ease you from this secret burden, will you bear, with strength and courage, the other which I plant on you?"

"I will do my best," said I.

"No man can do more," said he; and so began his story.

END OF VOL. II.







